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BLENDER

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO MUSIC AND MORE

★ "I THINK THEY GOT YOUR NUMBER" ★

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THE FABULOUS LIFE OF... U2

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"PEOPLE REALLY, *REALLY* HATE US"
GOOD CHARLOTTE

USHER
VANESSA CARLTON
THE KILLERS

FIERCE! IT'S... THE 25 GAYEST MOMENTS IN ROCK!

38
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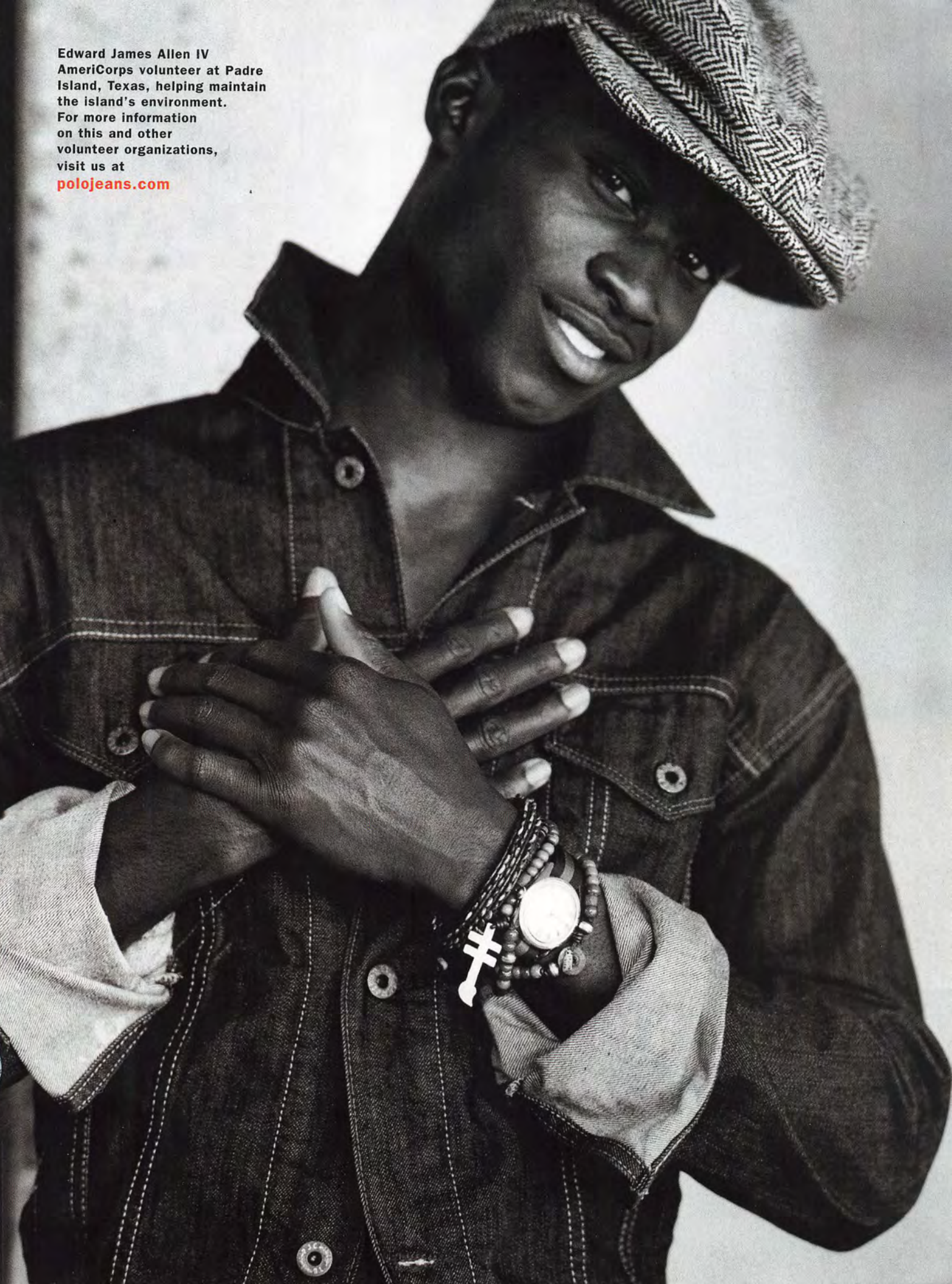

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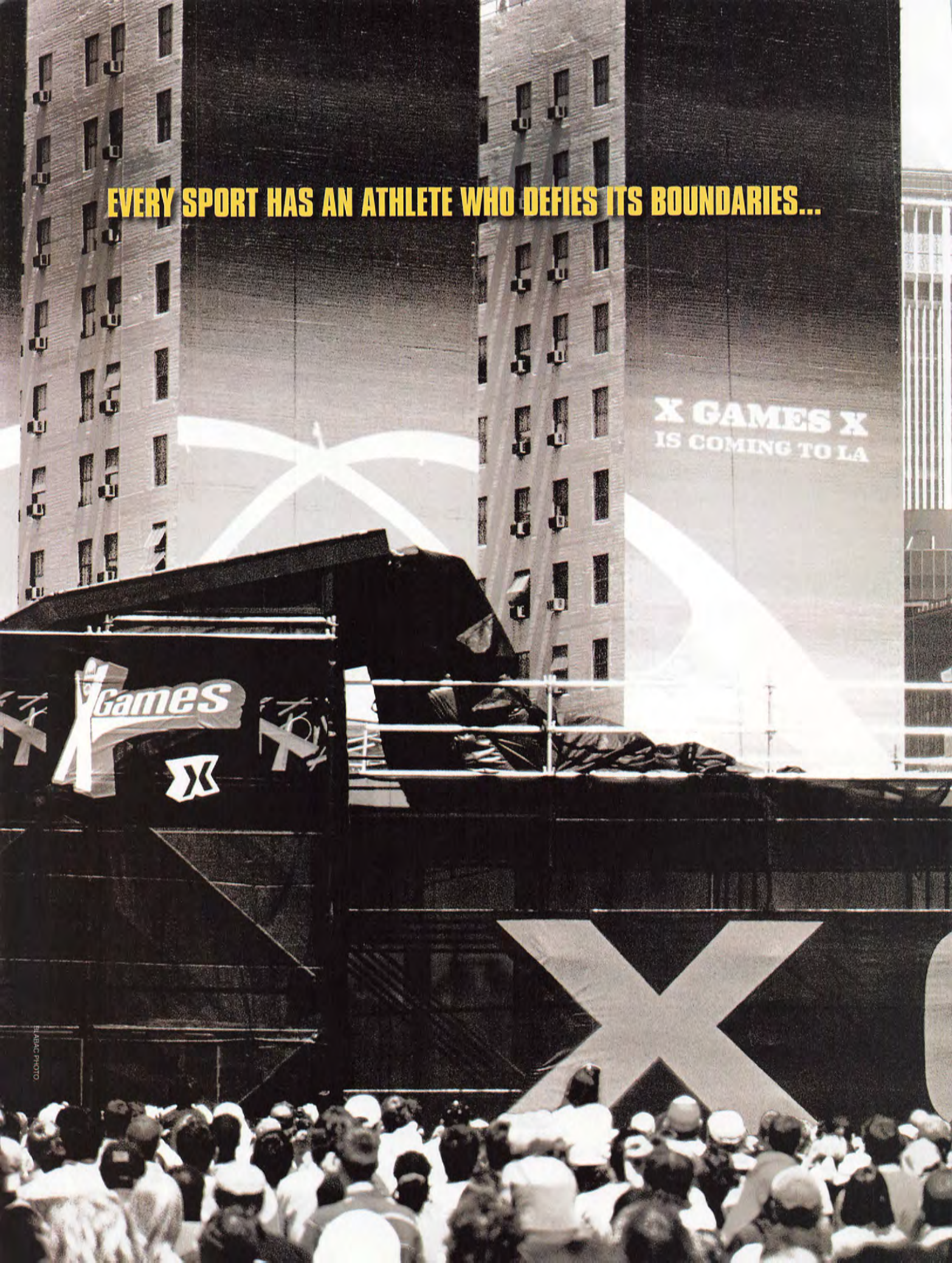
EVERY SPORT HAS AN ATHLETE WHO DEFIES ITS BOUNDARIES...
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IS COMING TO LA
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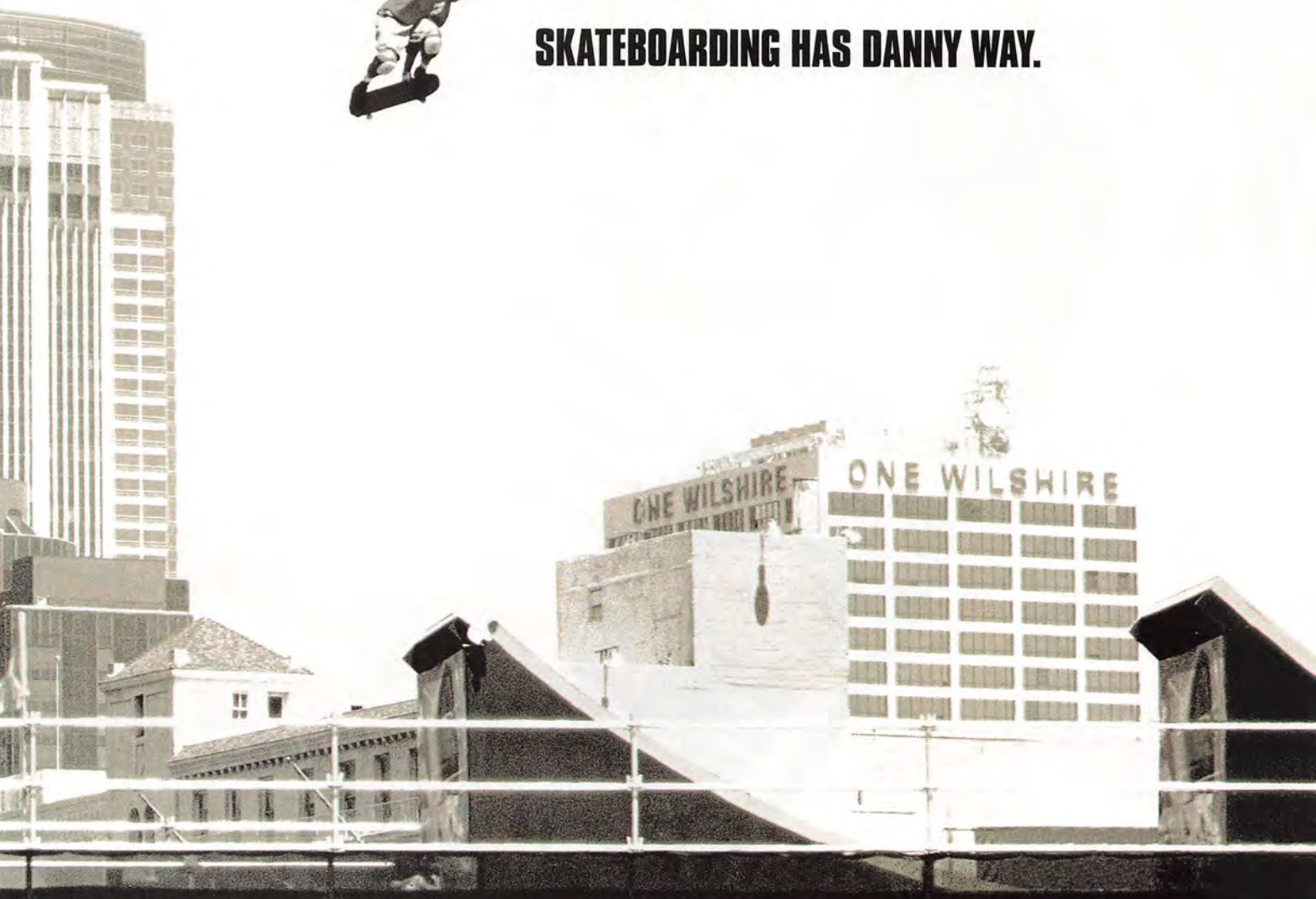
SKATEBOARDING HAS DANNY WAY.



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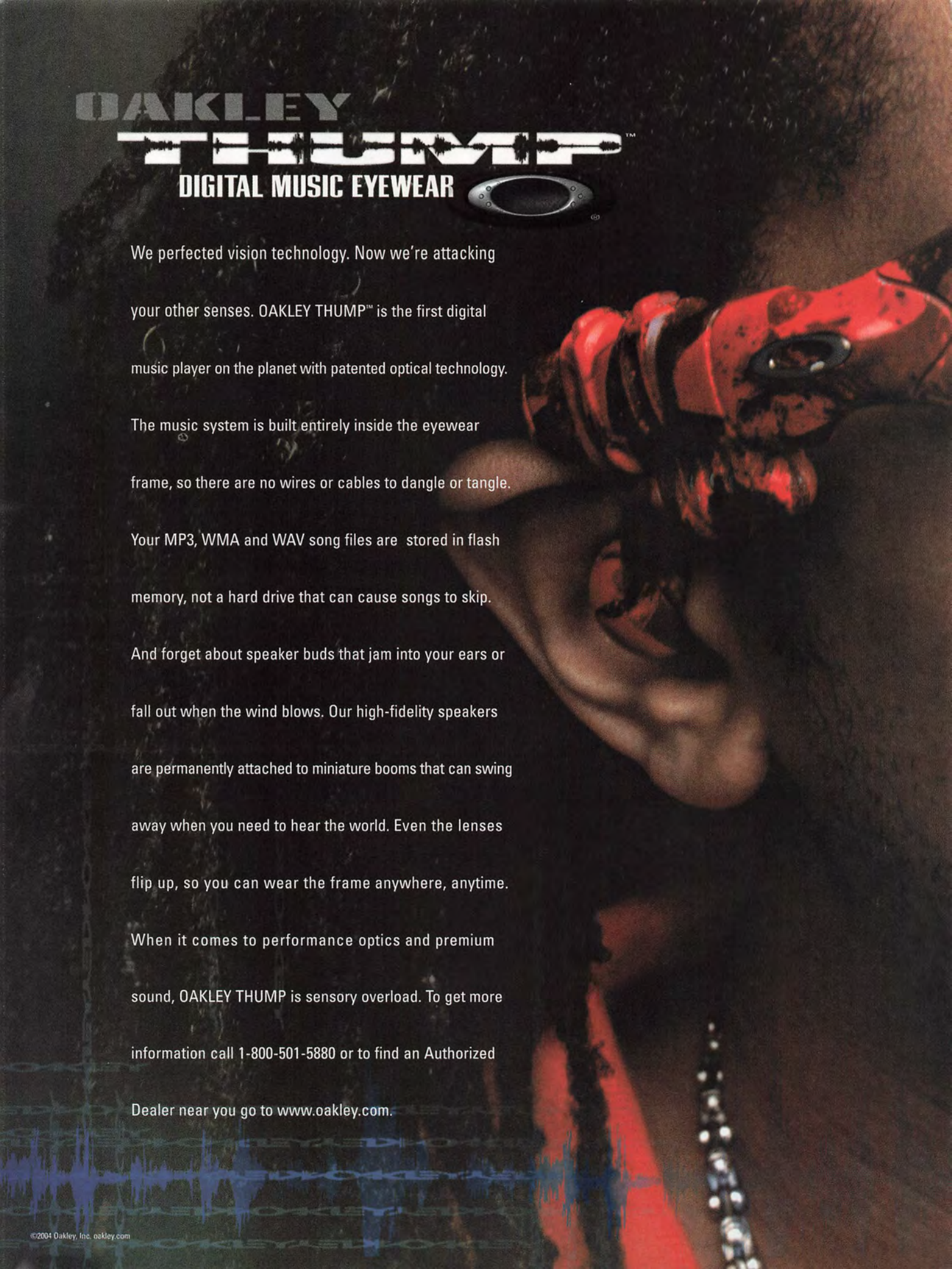
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BLENDER NOVEMBER 2004

FEATURES

112 U2
They've been together for 25 years, wear their fame like a favorite pair of jeans, and are just as comfortable politicking world leaders as they are sipping vintage wines in the south of France. *Blender* travels to Côte D'Azur for an intimate conversation with U2, still the world's greatest rock & roll band.

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82 $848: VANESSA CARLTON
Turns out this songbird is as eager to attend peep shows and schmooze voters as she is to craft ethereal but insistent melodies. *Blender* has the proof right here!

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More bands are being dropped from labels than ever before. But what happens to musicians after their rock & roll dreams turn to dust? Mostly bad things, it turns out....

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"WE'VE BEEN TOGETHER LONGER THAN ELVIS." BONO

ON THE COVER

PHOTOGRAPHY
PEROU

STYLING BY SHARON BLANKSON
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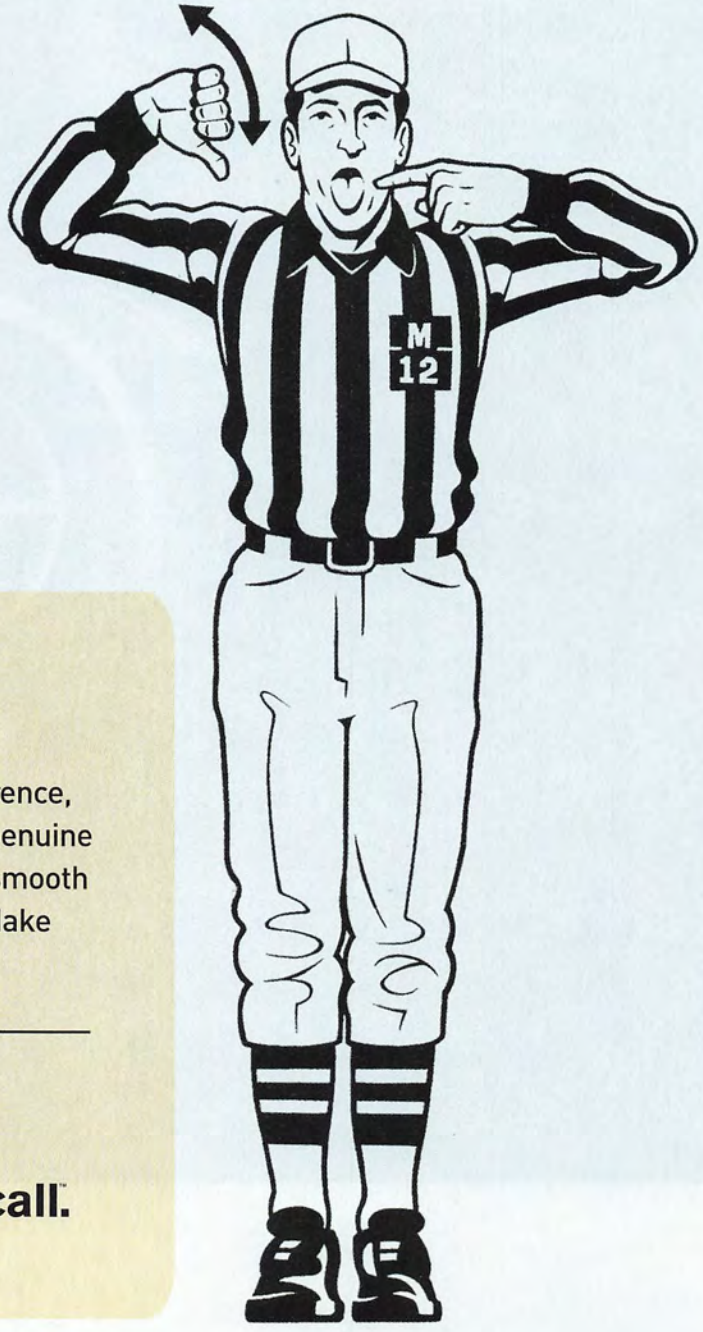

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A compelling argument for see-thru car covers.

The Z

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Chris McPherson

74 "WOODY GUTHRIE WOULD BE PROUD." WAYNE COYNE

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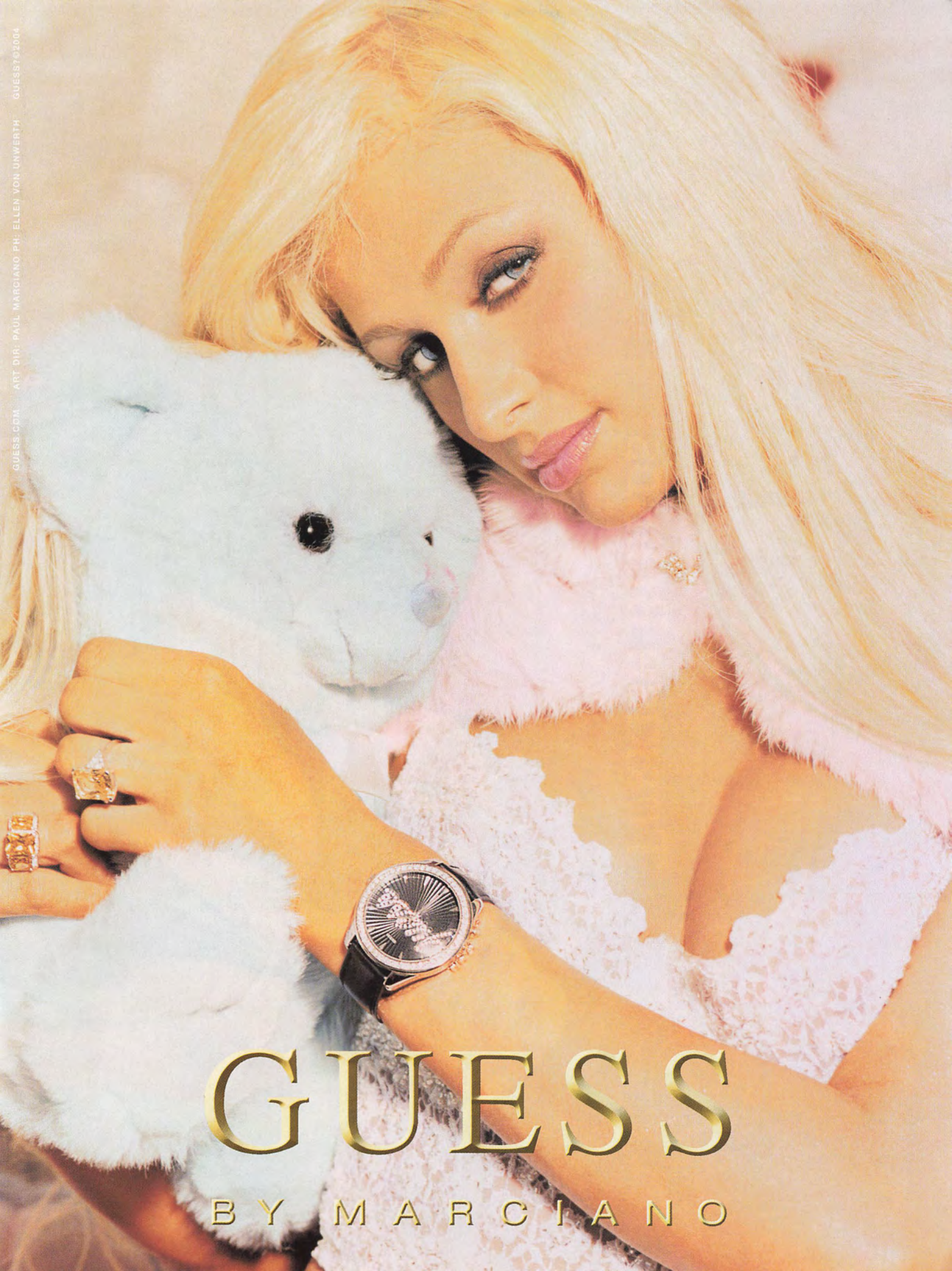
"THERE ARE BIGGER RELEASES IN LIFE THAN AN ORGASM." JULIETTE LEWIS

Photography by Sheryl Nields. Bathing suit by Huit from Xin, LA; fishnets from Retail Slut, LA; shoes by Casadei; gloves by Dorothy Gasper, LA; bracelets by Jelena Behrends Studio Studio, NY; earrings by N. Romano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Adrian Boot/Urbanimage.tv (Bono and Bruce Springsteen backstage at the Hammersmith Palais, 1981)

Dear Ketel One Drinker
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Long Live Everything!

GWEN STEFANI WAS sipping a cocktail. Ashlee and Jessica Simpson were nibbling sushi. The tiny Olsen twins were perched nearby. Owen Wilson and Johnny Knoxville were sharing a joke. It was business as usual at *Blender*'s party the night before MTV's VMA show in Miami: the widest cross-section of celebrity available to mankind, all close enough to hit with a muddy stick. I just wish I had brought my muddy stick, darn it.

"What an incredible party this is," I mused to Aldo, my Chilean factotum. The next day, things got even better, when several of my close, personal friends scooped gongs at MTV's Video Music Awards ceremony. *Blender* cover stars OutKast, Usher, No Doubt and Beyoncé all went home with a moon-man. Yay!

Could there be a downside? Of course! As Aldo keenly pointed out, apart from a cheerful three-minute interlude featuring Jet, Hoobastank and Yellow-card, there was hardly a note of rock to be heard at the awards.

So, to help resuscitate this obviously ailing art form, I have decided to launch a campaign. First, I am going to attempt to resuscitate Hookers & Blow, *Blender*'s admittedly tuneless in-house band. Then – well, that's it, actually.

I have discussed the matter with Aldo at length and, if he spoke English, I'm sure he would agree with me. This will be more than enough to reinvigorate the shambling wreck we call rock & roll. And what could be more incredible than that? Nothing!

Enjoy the issue.

ANDY PEMBERTON
EDITOR IN CHIEF

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You've_Got Mail

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FOOLS RUSH IN?

The lyric on your back page with Xzibit is totally appropriate! "This ain't no foolin' around" is from the Talking Heads classic "Life During Wartime." It's a sentiment we all need to keep in mind these days.

ROGER JAYSEN, SILVER SPRING, MD

DEATH PREDICTION

I want to commend *Blender* for recognizing the late, great Rick James on two consecutive covers! Weird thing is, you started with the Chappelle cover in August. Are you guys telepathic or something?

MARK HELLOER, LOS ANGELES, CA

ANOTHER DEATH PREDICTION

Congratulations, you finally did it. You killed your first rock star. We all know about the *Sports Illustrated* jinx, but now the "*Blender* jinx"? Dave Chappelle appears on your cover in a Rick James T-shirt and then Rick James is dead? Please have Dave do another cover shoot as soon as possible, but this time put him in a Moby T-shirt!

BRAD WARREN, FOREST HILL, MD

Nevermind Moby. What about the fact that Hilary Duff was wearing a Mickey Mouse T-shirt on the cover of the last issue? Jeez, if anything happens to that frickin' mouse. . . .

UGLY REPUTATION

I'm glad that Hilary Duff's mom/manager is so determined to protect her daughter, even if that means that she's got an "ugly reputation." I'm also glad I'm unlikely to ever meet her in a dark alley.

JANELLE GUILFOYLE, FLINT, MI

UNREAL BUBBLE

How appropriate that Hilary Duff's next album should be produced by the Matrix. Given the carefully constructed bubble of unreality that she appears to live in, the name used by those producers seems to be a perfect fit. Avril Lavigne, on the other hand, had the very good sense to drop them!

VICTORIA PREVATT, DEWEY BEACH, DE

TEENAGE RIOT

I really loved your "Greatest Teen Moments in Rock & Roll History" list. But I can't understand why Taylor Hanson was surprised that the band started a riot in Indonesia. If Hanson came to play near me, I know I'd be tempted to start throwing rocks, too.

SUE DRESINGER, FT. LAUDERDALE, FL

SEND IN THE CLONES

If Skye Sweetnam really wonders how she got a record deal almost effortlessly, I'll tell her, though her manager might want to censor it: It's 'cause she's so hot I'd fuck her, and I'm a straight, attached female. You saw her in the issue with the invasion of the Avril clones? At this point, it doesn't matter if the girl can sing, just as long as she makes Britney look like Slash!

ADA CHIAGHANA, WACO, TX

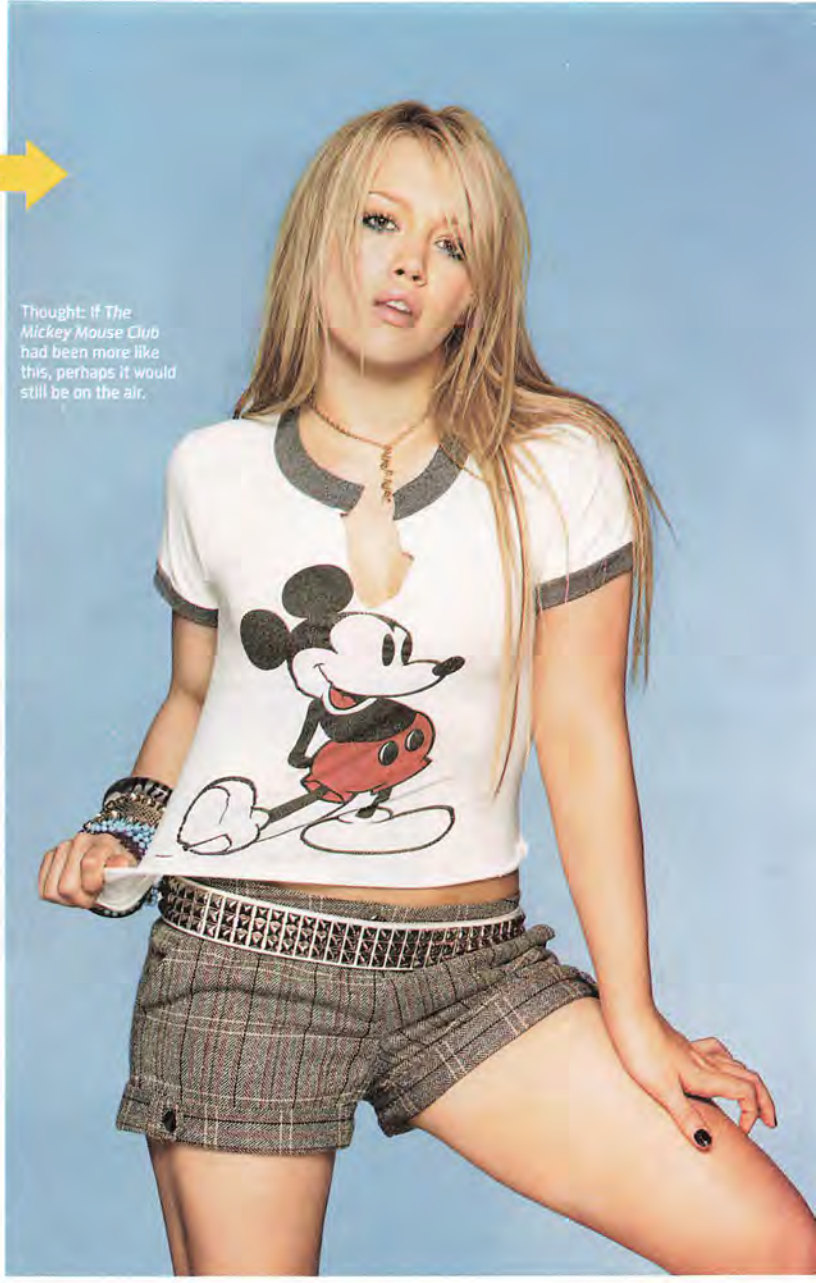
BLENDER IS AWESOME

I absolutely love your magazine. I've searched for such a long time to find a music magazine that actually covers music in its pages and finally I discovered *Blender*. I am currently enamored of Franz Ferdinand, so kudos for including them. My hat is tipped to you, *Blender*.

JEAN WHITE, CHEEKTOWAGA, NY

DOG DOGGY DOG

So, Bert McCracken, the lead singer from the Used, had a Chihuaha named David Bowie. Does this mean that, as well as your "If pop stars were dogs" piece, we can look ➔



Thought: If *The Mickey Mouse Club* had been more like this, perhaps it would still be on the air.

Danielle Levitt

★ Congratulations to the winner of *Blender*'s September Crossword contest, who walks away with a bitchin' Paradigm home-theater system: Deanna Baumann of Las Vegas!

LISTEN UP!

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Rose McGowan, photographed in March 2004, and — *weird* — Biggie Smalls in the same room in March 1997. Both in September's *Blender*!

forward to another regular: "If pop stars' dogs were named after other pop stars."

JOEL RUFALLO, TENAFLY, NJ

Yes. And by "yes" we mean "no."

CREEPY!

How can it be that the wallpaper behind Biggie Smalls [pg. 152] is the exact same design as in the shot of Rose McGowan? [pg. 148] Did you think I wouldn't notice? Your photographers need to expand their "steeze." At least the carpeting has been replaced in the last seven years.

JEWELZ DUNHAM, HUNKY ALLEY, PA

DEFILING CHICKENS!

Country stars Big & Rich can defend themselves all they like by arguing that, like them, Johnny Cash and Willie Nelson were also accused of defiling country. But neither of those other dudes ever dressed up as freakin' chickens!

STEVE KOVACS, REDONDO BEACH, CA

You're clearly forgetting the cover of their 1972 album of poultry-themed instrumentals, *Chicken Pickin'*.

WE'RE MISERABLE NOW

Wow, in your August issue, you quote Morrissey's "Every Day Is Like Sunday" twice [pgs. 20 and 40]! Do you need a hug?

JEREMIAH WADE, GOSHEN, IN

It's fine. Really. Sniff.

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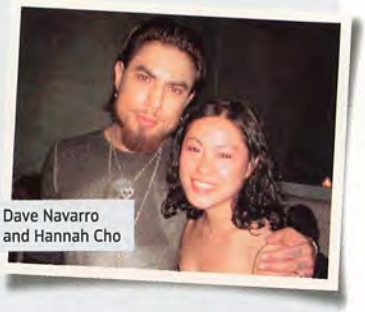
Devin Grant and Jeff Tweedy



Dave Navarro and Hannah Cho

Elton John and Gianny Leoni

Sean Williams and Bert McCracken

★ HEY MUSIC FAN! Send us shots of you with your favorite star — if we like what you take, we'll print it, and you'll get a Philips Digital Camera Key Ring like the one pictured to the left! Send us your pics, and please include your name, address and a phone number where we can reach you.

WAYNE COYNE!

Why does Wayne Coyne and/or the Flaming Lips have to be mentioned in every issue of *Blender*? Is Wayne related to the editor or something?

JOHN DARBYSHIRE, MANCHESTER, NH

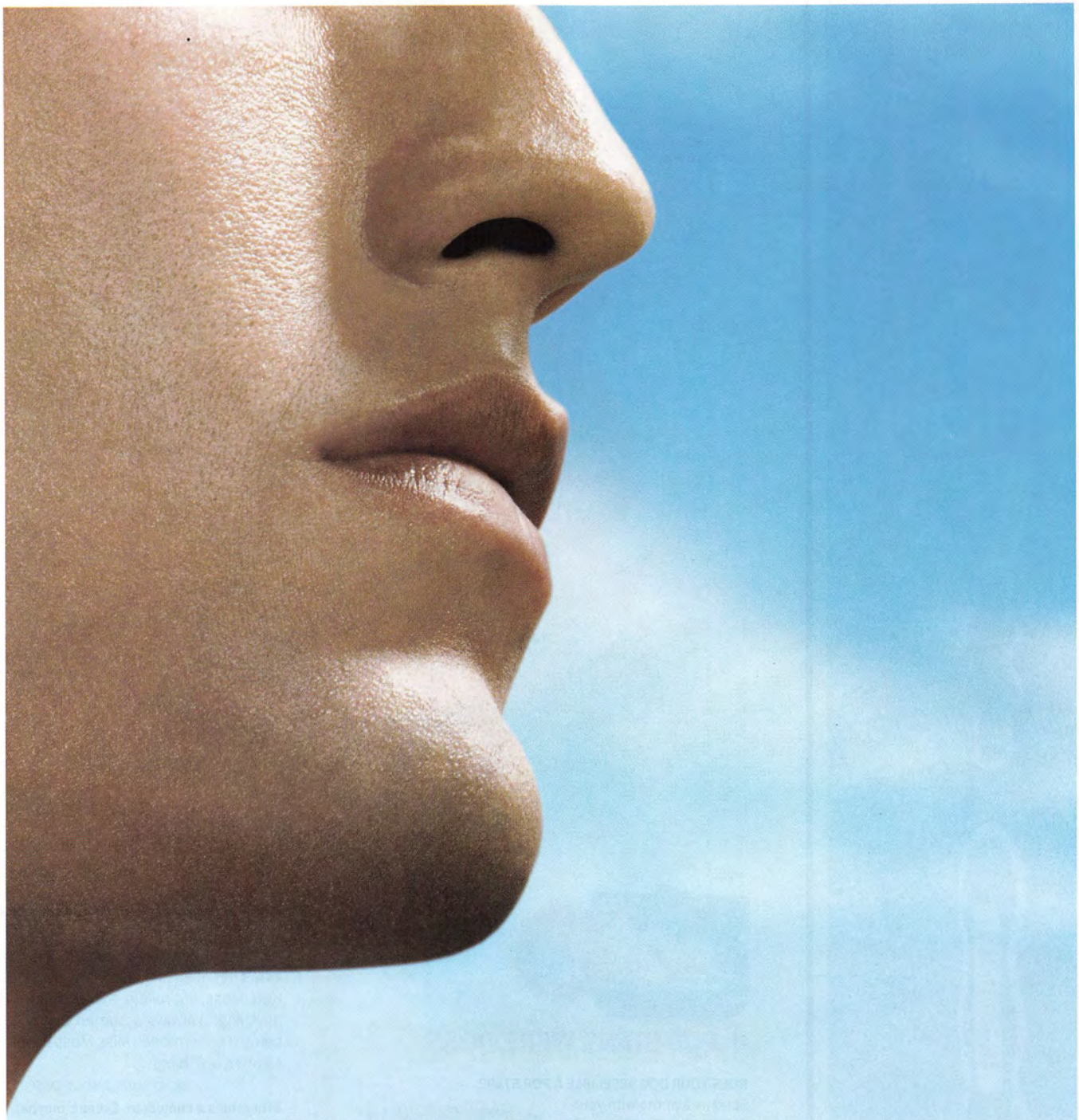
You've found us out! Wayne is actually his mother. It's a really long story. . . .

SADDEST STORY EVER!

On the cover of your September issue, you refer to your piece about the Libertines as "The Greatest Rock & Roll Story Ever Told." When you are handed the world on a silver platter and all you end up doing is vomiting on it, it's a travesty. As we've seen in the past, the most talented musicians have the most heartache. Can't Pete Doherty see what has happened to all the greats like Cobain, Joplin, Hendrix and all the other musicians who were taken from us way too early? You should have changed the line on the cover to "The Saddest Rock & Roll Story Ever Told."

RON VALDES, BROOKLYN, NY →

Top left: Justin Stephens (Rose McGowan); Shawn Mortensen/Corbis Outline (Biggie)



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NIVEA FOR MEN

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USE IT. FEEL IT.

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Later, the leopard would try to cop a feel.

WIN ME!

IF POP STARS WERE DOGS. . .

DOES YOUR DOG RESEMBLE A POP STAR?

Send us a photo with your name and address and who your dog is supposed to be. If we print your photo, you'll win this collection of 25 Universal DVDs, including the *Fast Times at Ridgemont High/Dazed and Confused Ultimate Party Collection.*

BEBE
THE DOG

MADONNA
THE POP STAR

HA! HA! HA!

I was stunned to read that Katy Perry listed her obsessions as Paris, France; Kate Moss; lint rollers – they clean anything!" I always assumed that being a supermodel, Miss Moss never cleaned anything!

PAUL HOFMENN, SAN LUIS OBISPO, CA

Everyone's a comedian. Except, maybe, you.

I LOVE ART BRUT

Thank you so much for recommending Art Brut's "Formed a Band" ["20 Songs You Must Download This Month," October]. You know that feeling when you hear a song and it stops you in your tracks because it sounds so simple and yet so right? When the promise of rock & roll is fulfilled and suddenly it seems like the best art form ever devised? That's what this song did for me. It is hands-down the best song I've heard in over a year. Thank you, *Blender*, for introducing it to me. You have justified your subscription fee.

GREG BONG, HOT SPRINGS, AZ

From top: Justin Stephens; Alphonse Telymonde; Heidi Skaggs; LFI

REACTION O_2

BAKING SODA AND PEROXIDE COMBINE. A REACTION OCCURS.
GET WHITER TEETH IN 14 DAYS. FEEL THE DIFFERENCE IN ONE.

You'll Love the Reaction.

4:28 PM masterLOEB: They can talk trash at the water cooler in their khakis and blue shirts all they want.

I'm done with my

Time to leave the rat race.

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10:46 AM Mickychita: The shop's still here–I'm standing right next to it. Hmmmm... I'm busting my hump lately. All I want to do is get on a plane and go down south and hit a bungalow. You wanna come? It's dirt cheap, the water's crystal clear and we can just bask in the sun all day. Don't say no!
1:43 PM Ayuni_45: I'm a happy soul and I like drinking smoothies too. They're supposed to improve your mood... I read it somewhere on the Internet. Guess I shouldn't go on about it, this being a coffee shop, but just know you're not alone.
9:22 PM MassiveNOSE: Let's get back to my girlfriend since she helped me surprise them a couple of weeks ago in London. Worked like a charm. Mikey Boy and his lady hit the roof when I walked through the door. Then he wrestled me to the ground. Yet another classic in the saga.
7:38 AM Sauce_of_G: I actually just saw two guys unload one from a van, walk across the sidewalk and then some idiot bumped right into it. Hilarious. Guy looked like Buster Keaton, staggering all over the place, rubbing his head. But he's fine. lol. I should get out of this office. I'm missing all the fun.
12:31 PM YaffeMEOD_18fl: Sorry, I had to get a soda to go with these crazy hot wings. It's gonna hurt later but whatever, I'm used to it. Hey, have you seen Mom? Dad's looking for her. I just want to eat these wings.
11:05 PM yall_song: It was what you'd expect. But the guy in the suit didn't say much. Never trust a guy in a suit by the way. Unless it's a nice suit. Unless they buy u a suit. That would suit me fine. K–I'll shut up now.
10:43 AM MACnCHiliz: It would be nice to move. I've been sitting in this seat way too long and I can't feel my right leg anymore. And there are actually people sitting in my seat who really shouldn't be. Right in front of me! Well, not really. I mean, I'm not even hea-aaah!
5:18 PM Dumb_Burt: You don't know what you're saying do u? You talk some pretty weak smack. I might find it in my heart to teach you a thing or two (but I'd have to charge). Til then, this cab driver's more interesting than you. Listen and learn, my friend.
3:10 PM Cheetah_27: So it's your birthday. Don't moan about silly little numbers. For all we know, the powers that be could have dictated the Earth travels around the Sun in 180 days. So you'd be 60 by now. Or that it'd make the same journey in twice the amount of time which would make you 15 and you'd still have bad skin. Point is–it's all relative. A number is a number. And they don't count. Words though, that's a different story.
1:49 AM Little_Miss_Doty: We're supposed to go to this new dive with mcgee and dana and everyone else. So don't be such a flake and come w/us. What's your deal anyway? Why don't you write back? I know you're there. Come back, I miss u. K then. Maybe I'll chitchat with someone else till u get back. Or play with that stress ball.
2:17 PM MuthaPacka: Actually, forget tonight. What are you doing now? Come to the deli? We can have a reuben. (That how u spell it?) I'm munching on a pickle right now. We can go to the gym tomorrow. Or the day after. Or never again.
11:56 AM Rebs_Faddulous79: So I love math. Big deal. Actually, scratch that. I don't love it. I live for it. I wish we could talk in math language. Does that exist? It should. And don't go calling me nuts or weird because this stuff turns me on. Can't you just accept all my wonderful idiosyncrasies?
3:04 PM ALEX_germ70: You sitting down? Course you are. I'm outside. Hold on, pesky pigeons. Beat it! I'm looking at this lady here who put a sweater, a knit cap and mittens on her dog. I feel a rant coming on.
Oh the bus,
under the tree,
from the club,
at the beach,
at large

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BURNER

★ DAVE MATTHEWS'S POO! ★ MR. SPEARS'S DAY OFF! ★ LIL JON'S FACE!

Steamy!

Blender throws a star-studded event in Miami on the eve of the VMAs!

★ "THIS PARTY IS hot. The DJs are great and I'm here with tons of my friends. What could be wrong?" Pharrell Williams said as he relaxed with Chad Hugo at the Shore Club in Miami. The Star Trak duo were co-hosts of *Blender*'s party, held at the hotel's Nobu restaurant and Sky Bar the night before MTV's Video Music Awards in August.

A flock of *Blender*'s friends came by to pay their respects and feast on tuna sashimi and vegetables twisted into swans. Pint-sized Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen were glimpsed whispering into each other's ears while the Flaming Lips' Wayne Coyne, wearing an anti-Bush button, chatted with Ashlee Simpson and New Found Glory's Chad Gilbert.

"*Blender* is the best music magazine," Coyne announced. "It kills the rest."

Gwen Stefani, sipping juice with No Doubt's Tony Kanal, was uncharacteristically laidback. "I'm a bit sleepy," she sighed, tapping her foot to the music. "I just flew in from London."

Meanwhile a film crew was busy recording Farrah Fawcett's every move for a planned reality TV show. "I'm having so much fun," the former *Charlie's Angels* star told *Blender*, picking a spicy shrimp from a bowl. "I've never been to Miami. But I love what the humidity does to my hair."

Other guests included Mary J. Blige, Tony Hawk, Bam Margera, Owen Wilson, Johnny Knoxville, Naomi Campbell and imposing label boss Suge Knight, who decided he didn't need a wristband to enter the party. *Blender* decided not to argue with him.

Hulk Hogan, in a black tanktop and fanny-pack, also caused a stir when he introduced his 16-year-old daughter, Brooke, an aspiring pop star. "Whatcha gonna do when *Blender*-mania and Brooke-a-mania run wild on you?" he yelled, pumping his arms. The crowd by the red carpet responded with thunderous applause. *VICTORIA DESILVERIO*

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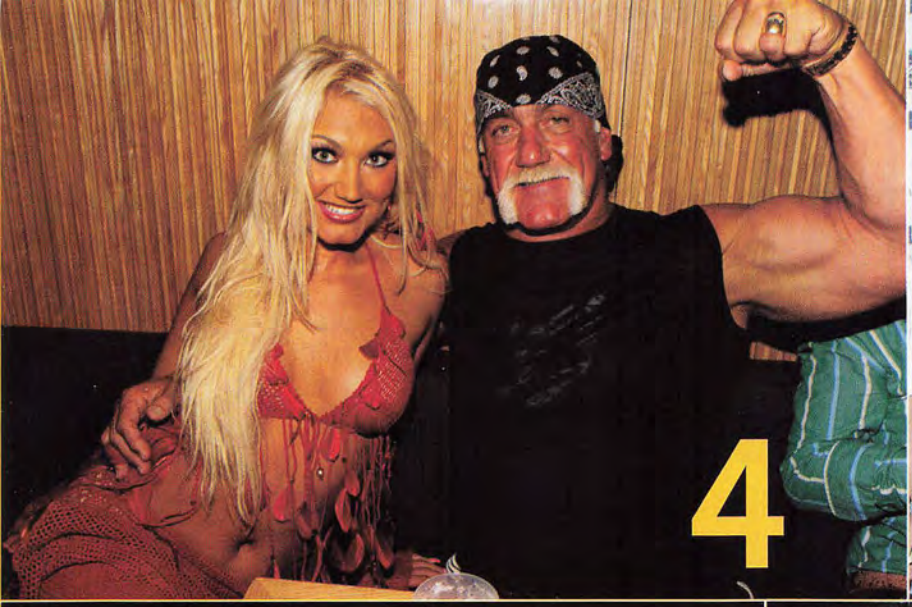

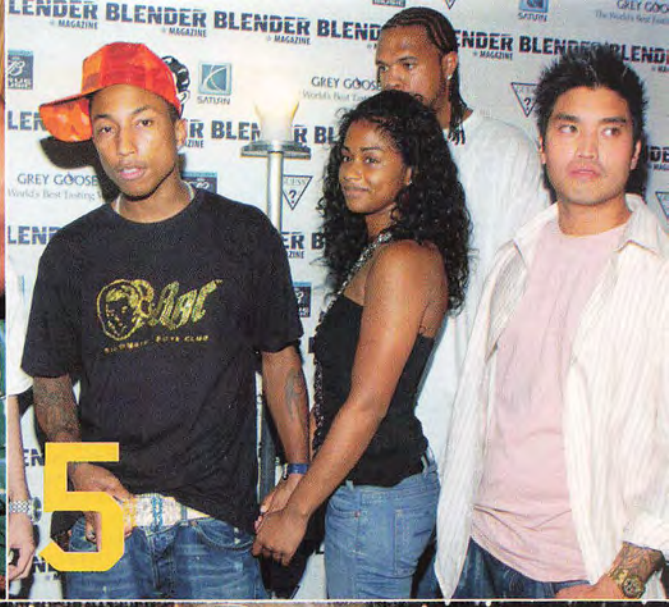

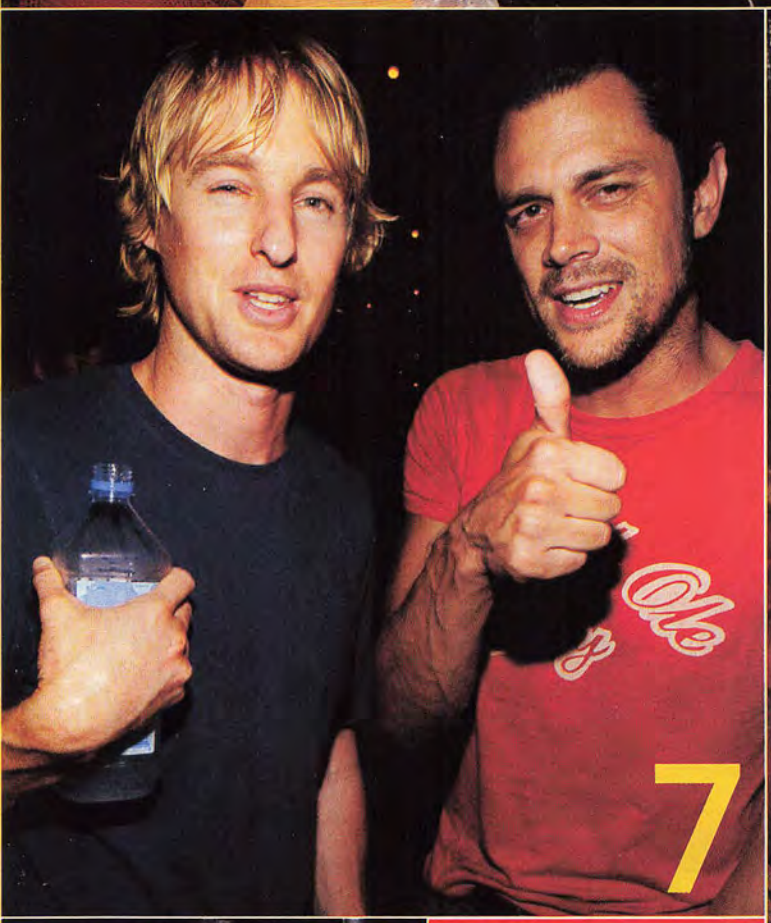

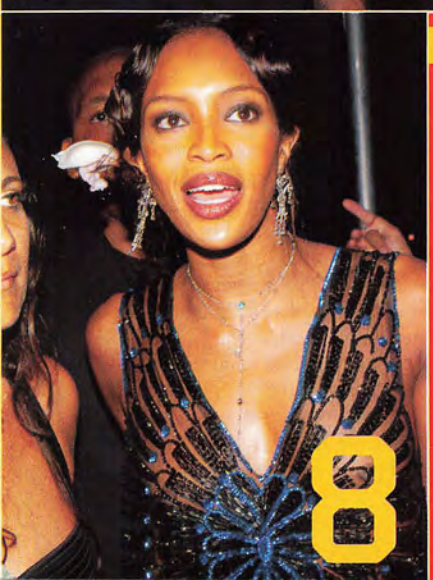

PARTY PEOPLE!

1 Jessica and Ashlee Simpson
2 Nick Lachey and friend
3 DJ Samantha Ronson
4 Brooke Hogan and papa Hulk Hogan
5 Pharrell Williams and girlfriend with (*far right*) Chad Hugo
6 Gwen Stefani
7 Owen Wilson and Johnny Knoxville
8 Naomi Campbell
9 Farrah Fawcett

Stinson was *not* in Duran Duran.

DO YOU ROCK?

TOMMY STINSON

Does ex-Replacements, current Guns N' Roses bassist . . . rock?

Ever trash a hotel room?
One time with the Replacements, our tour manager was losing at poker so he picked up the table and threw it out the window into the pool. After that, it turned into a real nightmare.

Biggest celeb's home you've gotten drunk in?
Winona Ryder.

Ever had a brush with the law?
When I was 19, I was drinking a vodka and O.J. backstage in Oklahoma. Right before I walked onstage, the cops grabbed me and threw me in jail for underage drinking!

Ever wrecked a car?
I've never driven a car.

Worst rock & roll injury?
During a Guns N' Roses show in Rio, I landed really hard from a kick and chipped my tibia, but I just let it go.

Worst place you've ever been sick?
When the Replacements were opening for Tom Petty, I threw up out of a car window during the entire drive from Philadelphia to Long Island.

Most decadent thing ever done?
We [the Replacements] were totally wasted and thought it would be fun to throw everything out of the RV, including chairs. My brother tried to kick out the windshield even though it was 35 below!

Ever gotten lucky on an airplane?
More than once. *DAVE HILL*

VERDICT

UNTREATED TIBIA INJURIES? TOMMY STINSON ROCKS LIKE NO OTHER!

→ TOMMY STINSON'S NEW SOLO ALBUM *VILLAGE GORILLA HEAD (SANCTUARY)* IS OUT NOW.

NEWS ROUNDUP!

An old Memphis apartment inhabited by ELVIS PRESLEY and his parents from 1949 to 1953 has been saved from demolition and is up for rent. Staff from Graceland helped furnish the home in authentic '50s style.

Retired pastor J.D. TURNER of Georgia has complained about ALICIA KEYS fans calling his home at 489-4608, the phone number featured in her single "Diary."

LED ZEPPELIN have refused to allow their Live Aid set onto a forthcoming DVD. PHIL COLLINS replaced late drummer JOHN BONHAM for their notoriously poor performance at the 1985 charity concert.

WORD!

"I can't believe that girl bought her own engagement ring! I've seen it up close; it looks like she got it on *QVC*."

CHRISTINA ON BRITNEY

First rule of Onstage Fight Club: You don't talk about Onstage Fight Club.

Second rule of Onstage Fight Club: You don't talk about Onstage Fight Club.

Third rule of Onstage Fight Club: Hit him with a guitar!

Fight! Fight! Fight!

Finch and Disturbed fight onstage in front of fans. *All right!*

★ MEMBERS OF ROCK bands Finch and Disturbed brawled onstage in front of 25,000 startled fans in Latrobe, Pennsylvania.

"It's the worst fight I've seen in music," said Laura Farr, a photographer who attended the Rolling Rock Town Fair in August. "At one point, they almost rolled off the stage."

As Finch were setting up, Disturbed guitarist Don Donegan pointed mockingly at Finch. Words were exchanged and Disturbed rushed the stage. Some fans reacted with cheers and jeers; others flung mud on the scrapping musicians.

The fight was ignited by an interview that appeared in 2002, when Finch's Randy Strohmeyer threatened to shoot Disturbed's David Draiman "in the fucking head," saying, "Their music is terrible, and what they're all about, it's just shit."

Police arrived at the scene but no charges were filed. Both bands refused comment. *JOHANNA PIAZZA*

Right: Jason Nelson/AdMedia/Sipa Press (3). Gary French (illustration)

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THE NEXT BIG THING!

Holly Williams

Opening for Billy Bob Thornton? Hank Williams's granddaughter has paid her dues.

BY NICK DUERDEN
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JONATHAN SKOW

THE GRANDDAUGHTER OF Hank Williams, perhaps the most revered country singer of all time, and daughter of Hank Williams Jr., one of the major country stars of the 1980s, 23-year-old Holly Williams found making music unavoidable. For a time, however, she was determined to scotch all expectations.

"I never thought music would be my career," she says, at home in — where else? — Nashville. "I was thinking of acting, painting or even interior design."

But fate is persistent. And when she picked up a guitar at the age of 18, she became a singer-songwriter. The next five years were spent on the road, living a determinedly bohemian lifestyle, playing small tours and, occasionally, as support to Billy Bob Thornton and Ron Sexsmith. Her debut, *The Ones We Never Knew*, is a tender collection of winsome country folk songs, many of which make her sound like a rather downcast Jewel.

"No!" she says with a laugh. "I don't want people to see me as another depressed young singer writing about sad relationships — even though, you know, I've had my fair share."

And yet she admits that her boho existence makes it difficult to maintain a relationship and that her best song ("I'll Only Break Your Heart") is also sad.

"Well," she shrugs, "my heroes are Elliott Smith and Tom Waits, and I find it easy to write introspective songs, but my personality is about humor. I laugh a lot!"

Unconcerned with sales, she's happy to live out of a suitcase on the road. "I'm such a fan of Jack Kerouac and the Beat generation," she says. "And I love travel. It's the only way to experience life." [BLENDER]

>> OUT NOW THE ONES WE NEVER KNEW *UNIVERSAL SOUTH*

A COLLECTION OF WINSOME COUNTRY FOLK SONGS

ALL ABOUT ME!

BIRTHDATE:
March 12, 1981

LYRIC MOST PROUD OF WRITING
"Nothing feels good if it ain't true, it's like trying to cry for someone you never knew," from "Cheap Parades"

TYPICAL NIGHT OF DEBAUCHERY INCLUDES...
"Good friends, good whiskey and good lovin'."

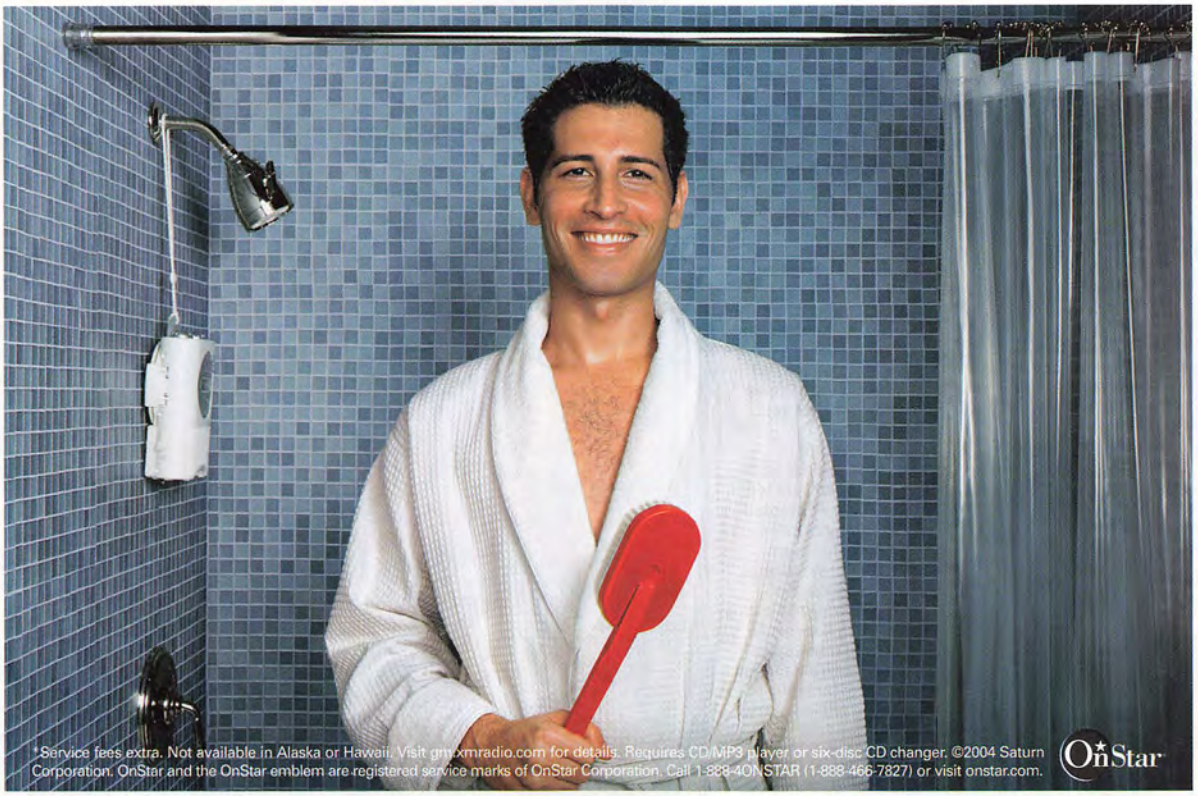
FAVORITE MOVIE TO WATCH ON TOUR
This Is Spinal Tap

RECOMMENDED ACTIVITY WHILE LISTENING
"Organizing the sock drawer."

DRESS BY MARC JACOBS

Styling: April Johnson; makeup: Kim Carillo for M.A.C/Judy Casey; hair: Laura De Leon for Price Inc.

The Man Who Could Not Sing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People first.

Sly and the family stoned?

NOW HEAR THIS!

Three music nabobs select songs the world really needs to hear

BJÖRK
"SAURESCHNAUZE" BODENSTÄNDIG 2000
"It's an a cappella rave song. It sounds so effortless, like anybody could do it, but I tried and it's really hard. When I play it, people get confused, then happy."

AFRIKA BAMBAATAA
"STAND!" SLY AND THE FAMILY STONE
"I live my life by this song. With his interracial band, Sly was one of the first to bridge the gap between black and white in concert."

DAVID CROSBY
"PAPER WALLS" MARC COHN
"It's a wonderful, offbeat song about a guy in a motel listening to people in the next room making love. The label made a mistake: They didn't think it was a hit." *LAUREN HARRIS*

TELL US A JOKE!

JC CHASEZ

What do you see when the Pillsbury Doughboy bends over? *Doughnuts!*

AS TOLD TO PETER SMALLEY

NEWS ROUNDUP!

BRITNEY SPEARS and fiancé **KEVIN FEDERLINE** are reportedly planning to start their wedding day by getting matching tattoos. "They want something that will mean something to them in years to come," a friend said.

Rapper **C-MURDER** has been indicted for attempted murder. The artist, born Corey Miller, is accused of trying to shoot a club owner in Baton Rouge with a handgun after being refused entry.

THE DARKNESS star **DAN HAWKINS** has confessed he suffers from an eating disorder. "I find myself comfort eating and throwing up and all that crap," he said. "It's not a thing that just affects women."

WORD!

"I'm overworked. I wish I had a day off where I didn't have to make decisions. It's a sacrifice."
HILARY DUFF

Jonathan Smith, aka Lil Jon, in his autographed senior portrait, 1989.

GEEK WATCH!

Lil Jon, aka Jonathan Smith, 2004 version.

Whaaaaat?

Blender exposes Lil Jon's uncrunky past. Okaaay!

★ *BLENDER* HAS DISCOVERED a photo of Lil Jon at a severely uncrunk time in his life, thus solving a lingering mystery concerning the rapper.

In recent months, a high school yearbook headshot of a young man in Urkel-like glasses has been circulating on Internet message boards with posts claiming the geek was the King of Crunk. "That's not him," Lil Jon's representative said.

Though the identity of the mathlete remains unknown, *Blender* has found Lil Jon's *real* senior portrait, taken in 1989 while he was a student at Atlanta's Frederick Douglass High School.

Talking to *Blender* last August, he named his high school interests: "I used to skateboard . . . and listen to a lot of Ramones, Dead Kennedys, Sex Pistols, PiL," he said. *NOEL BODDIE*

WEIRD BAND ALERT!

ARNOCORPS

It's a Schwarzenegger tribute band, of course.

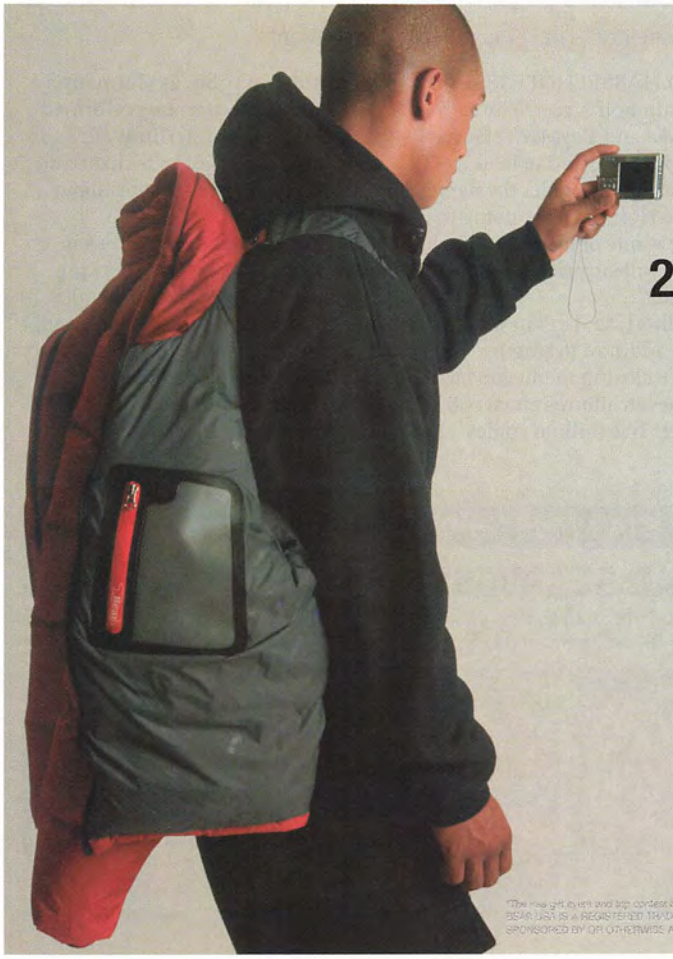
A tribute to the Governator?
Not entirely. Only Schwarzenegger's action classics inspire the Berkeley, California-based band. According to their Austrian-born singer, Holzfeuer, 31, these movies harness a mythic Austrian energy the band calls Arno. "I learned of Arno when I was a baby in my crib," he says.

What does "the world's only action adventure hardcore rock & roll band" sound like?
Aggressive and fast, basically. "We're ballsy," bassist Toten Adler, 29, says.

Sadly, there are no roadies on Mars.

Sounds dangerous.
"We're not assassins," says Adler, who wears a commando vest and facepaint. "When Arno is unleashed, it's like an orgasm. It's like I'm coming the whole time I'm onstage!" *STEVE LOWE*

Top right: Philip McCollum; Jason Squires/Wireimage.com (inset). Bottom right: Courtesy of Arnocorps. Gary French (illustration). Left, from top: Bettmann/Corbis; Steve Granitz/Wireimage.com; Dan Herrick/ZUMI; Scott Weiner/Retna Ltd.; Steve Granitz/Wireimage.com



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WHEN WILL YOUR FAVORITE POP STAR CROAK?

Weiland, preparing for gay aliens to land?

SCOTT #13 WEILAND

CURRENT AGE	36
AVERAGE AMERICAN'S LIFE EXPECTANCY	79

CATEGORY	YEARS ADDED/SUBTRACTED
Drug addiction: He's the poster-boy for heroin dependency	–9
Marital distress – arrested for domestic battery	–6
Performing requires enormous amounts of energy – in his condition, he requires oxygen tank for shows	–11
Stress caused by unsuccessful solo career	–2
Injection of new creative energy with Velvet Revolver	+4
Potential accidents due to reckless stage performances	–1
Stress-inducing fish-bowl existence due to prurient media interest	–6
Has a toddler in his "terrible 2s"	–3
Commitment to spirituality (see song "Naked Sunday")	+3
Survivor mentality: He has hit bottom physically, creatively, mentally	+1
ESTIMATED LIFE EXPECTANCY	49

PROJECTED YEAR OF DEATH **2017**

GERONTOLOGIST DR. DEMKO SAYS: "Start looking for a new heart, pronto! Drugs have shortened his life-expectancy. However, he can add years by dropping them immediately. Above all, he must make family life his priority. Success must be shared to be enjoyed."

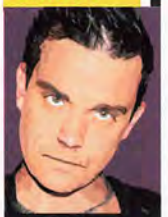
NEWS ROUNDUP!

MADONNA insisted concert promoters on her European Reinvention tour provide a sound-proofed "peace room" so she could meditate before each performance.

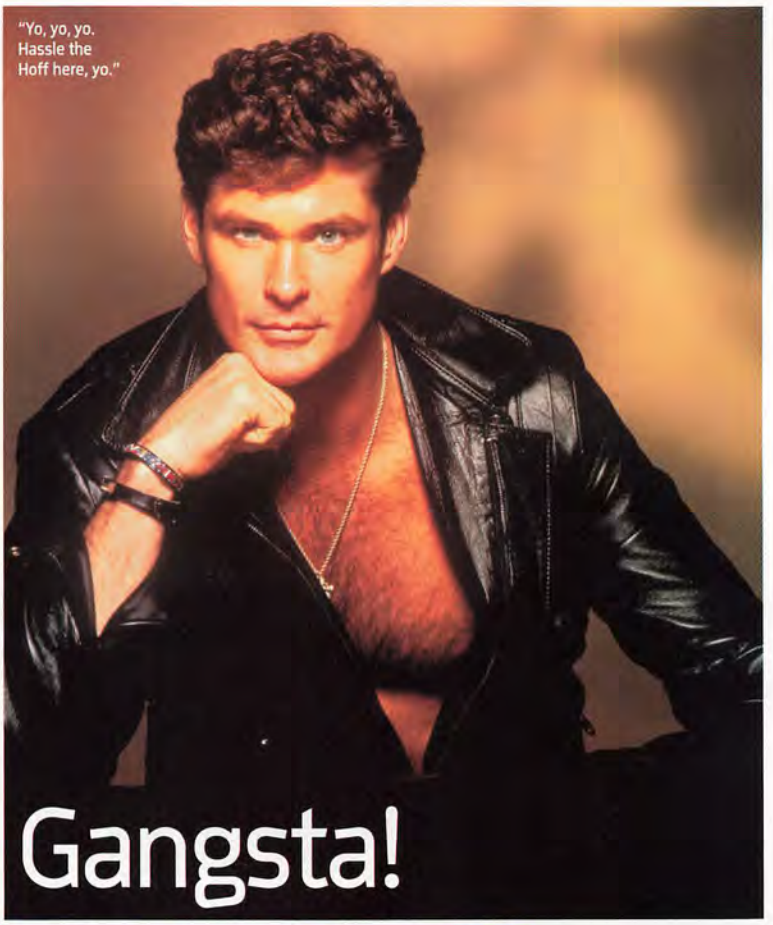
An NYC night-club party hosted by JOEY FATONE was disturbed by ANDY DICK, who allegedly groped clubbers before rolling on the floor screaming for cocaine. Dick then vomited on a member of *Blender*'s photo department, and barricaded himself in the kitchen crying, "My best friend is dead!" referring to RICK JAMES.

BEYONCÉ received a reported $4.7 million for endorsing L'Oréal hair products. For this sum, the singer must work 10 days a year.

WORD!



"Liam [Gallagher] and I used to snort shit loads of 'charlie' and sing 'Sgt. Pepper' to each other."
ROBBIE WILLIAMS



"Yo, yo, yo. Hassle the Hoff here, yo."

Gangsta!

David Hasselhoff's next move? Rap domination!

★ DAVID HASSELHOFF IS set to launch a hip-hop career. The former *Knight Rider* and *Baywatch* star has teamed with gangsta-rap icon Ice-T to record an album under the name Hassle the Hoff. "We are going to show a new side of him," Ice-T said. "The Hoff will surprise people with his rap skills."

Hasselhoff, 52, isn't new to music. In addition to singing *Baywatch*'s closing theme, he has released seven albums since 1984, selling over five million copies worldwide. In 1989, as Germany's best-selling pop star, he performed at the just-toppled Berlin Wall. Soon after, he scored a hit in Switzerland with "Pingu Dance," a song about a cartoon penguin.

Hasselhoff made headlines in June with a DUI arrest. Checking into the Betty Ford Center for alcoholism two years earlier, he mused, "I once thought about writing a book called *The Minibar and Me*."

No release date for his forthcoming album has been set. *NOEL BODDIE*

POP STAR MUST-HAVE

HEAD SCARVES!

Can't be bothered to tend your celebrity hair? That's OK. Neither can they!

BRITNEY SPEARS

JENNIFER LOPEZ

STEVE VAN ZANDT

JESSICA SIMPSON

BLU CANTRELL

Clockwise from top left: John Shearer/Wireimage.com; Mike Prior/LFI; Splash News; Eliot Press/Bauer-Griffin.com; Lawrence Lucier/Filmmagic.com; Theo Wargo/Wireimage.com; Ronald Asadorian/Splash News; Gary French (illustration)

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THE NEXT BIG THING!

The Game

Until stardom beckoned, Jayceon Taylor's life was appalling

BY JONAH WEINER

"THE BULLET THAT hurt most clipped my heart," the Game announces. "I got hit in the leg and the stomach, but *that* was the worst. They couldn't measure how close I came to dying. A hair. Half a hair."

The Game — a Compton MC who claims Dr. Dre as his mentor — is only 24, but he's known enough pain to fill three lifetimes. From age 7 to 14, Jayceon Taylor lived in a foster home after family trouble split him from his parents. "It screwed up my life," he says. At 14, he witnessed the murder of his brother Jevon: "He died over a girl. He chased women, and he gave his life in return."

Now, as he recalls the most horrifying night of his life, the Game is stone-faced. In October 2001, three men stormed the crack spot he helped operate in Bellflower, California. A tussle ensued, and five shots struck him. "I figured my life was over."

The injury sparked a passion for rap. "I recovered at home, and I was bored, so I just listened to music," he explains. Jay-Z's *Reasonable Doubt*, N.W.A's *Straight Outta Compton* and Biggie's *Ready to Die* were on heavy bedside rotation. "Like a lawyer studying for the bar, that's how I studied those albums." By 2002, his 30-track demo found its way to Dr. Dre, who signed him instantly. "That's like meeting Mickey Mouse!" the Game says, laughing. "It felt like a dream."

This month, the Game's debut, a mix of vintage N.W.A menace and gangsta pop, hits shelves. For the Game, it's more than an album, it's therapy. "I speak the trials and tribulations of my childhood," he says. "My pen and pad is like having a shrink. I release demons. That's why I keep going." [BLENDER]

A MIX OF VINTAGE N.W.A MENACE AND GANGSTA POP

ALL ABOUT ME!

OBSESSIONS
"Money. I got a lot of people to feed."

WON'T TOUR WITHOUT
"Green tea."

DUFF OR LOHAN?
"Duff! I partied with her. She likes my music and I love her."

BUSH OR KERRY?
"Kerry. When a Bush is in office, Americans die."

>>> OUT OCTOBER 26
N.W.A. VOL.1 *(AFTERMATH/G-UNIT/INTERSCOPE)*

Courtesy of Aftermath/G Unit/Interscope

"Niggas start to mumble, they wanna rumble, mix 'em and cook 'em in a pot like gumbo"

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ArtCenter College of Design

For more information on the shoe and the scholarship, please visit www.dcshoes.com, www.linkinpark.com or www.artcenter.edu.

WHAT'S IN YOUR BAG?

Armand Van Helden attempts to contain his excitement.

ARMAND VAN HELDEN

Academy Records Store, 77 East 10th Street, New York

FLEETWOOD MAC RUMOURS
"This album is phenomenal: amazing originality and songwriting, very emotional and deep, but not in a tiring way. And it has a very artsy cover."

STEELY DAN GREATEST HITS
"They combine amazing jazz with lyrics about partying and drugs and being with young girls or doing cocaine. They're straight street-gangsta lyrics."

TALK TALK THE COLOUR OF SPRING
"I love almost every song on the album. It's '80s music, but it doesn't sound like anything from the '80s. It doesn't belong to any one era."

THE DOOBIE BROTHERS BEST OF THE DOOBIES
"Homegrown Southern fun – like being at a house party in the '70s, drinking tequila and smoking herb." *LAUREN HARRIS*

→ ARMAND VAN HELDEN'S NEW ALBUM, *NEW YORK: A MIX ODYSSEY* (*TOMMY BOY*), IS OUT NOW.

NEWS ROUNDUP!

JACK WHITE's nephew claimed the White Stripes are near splitting. **BEN BLACKWELL** said he believed his uncle was "near done." A spokesperson for the duo called the claims "spurous," saying they are now writing a new album.

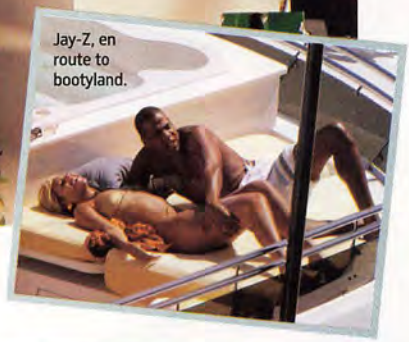
BLACK REBEL MOTORCYCLE CLUB walked out of an autograph signing session at England's V Festival after a fan presented them with a giant inflatable penis. "I guess I should laugh at that stuff more," singer **PETER HAYES** later said.

VAN HALEN are suing the Baltimore Orioles for $2 million after the team canceled a concert at its Camden Yards park. The band claims the team offered them $1.5 million to play, leading them to cancel less lucrative gigs.

WORD!

"I want to go to fucking bed."
SHAUN RYDER, FORMERLY A HEROIN AND CRACK ADDICT, ON WHAT HE WANTS TO DO NOW THAT HE'S SOBER

"Shit! People can't fly!"


Jay-Z, en route to bootyland.

Sexy!

Beyoncé and Jay-Z get loose in Europe on blinged-out yacht

★ NOTORIOUSLY PRIVATE couple Jay-Z and Beyoncé Knowles spent most the summer vacationing together in exotic European hotspots such as St. Tropez in France and Monaco.

"They've really been kicking back and relaxing," a source says of the loved-up pair, who rented a 160-foot yacht at the hefty rate of $10,000 a week. Jay-Z has been spotted onboard applying tanning oil to Beyoncé's body.

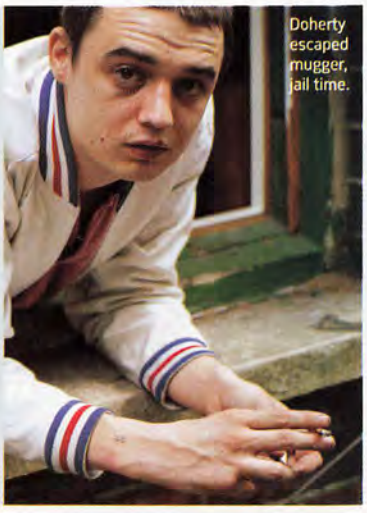
When she wasn't relaxing, Beyoncé was in the studio working on Destiny's Child's fifth record, due this month. Meanwhile, despite his recent rap retirement, Jay-Z is touring throughout the fall with R. Kelly. *LAUREN HARRIS*

STILL ILL

Ex-Libertines singer mugged!

TROUBLES CONTINUE FOR former Libertines front man Pete Doherty, who is suspended from the band for crack addiction. Last month, an unknown attacker dragged him onto a London road and threatened to stab him. "I scramble witless to my feet," Doherty said, "stop [a] car, get in and scream, 'Get the fuck out of here.' "

Doherty was recently charged for possession of a switchblade. Pleading guilty, he got a suspended sentence. The Libertines' new album premiered at the number-1 U.K. spot. *STEVE LOWE*


Doherty escaped mugger, jail time.

Left: Tim Soter (5). Bottom right: Mirror Pix

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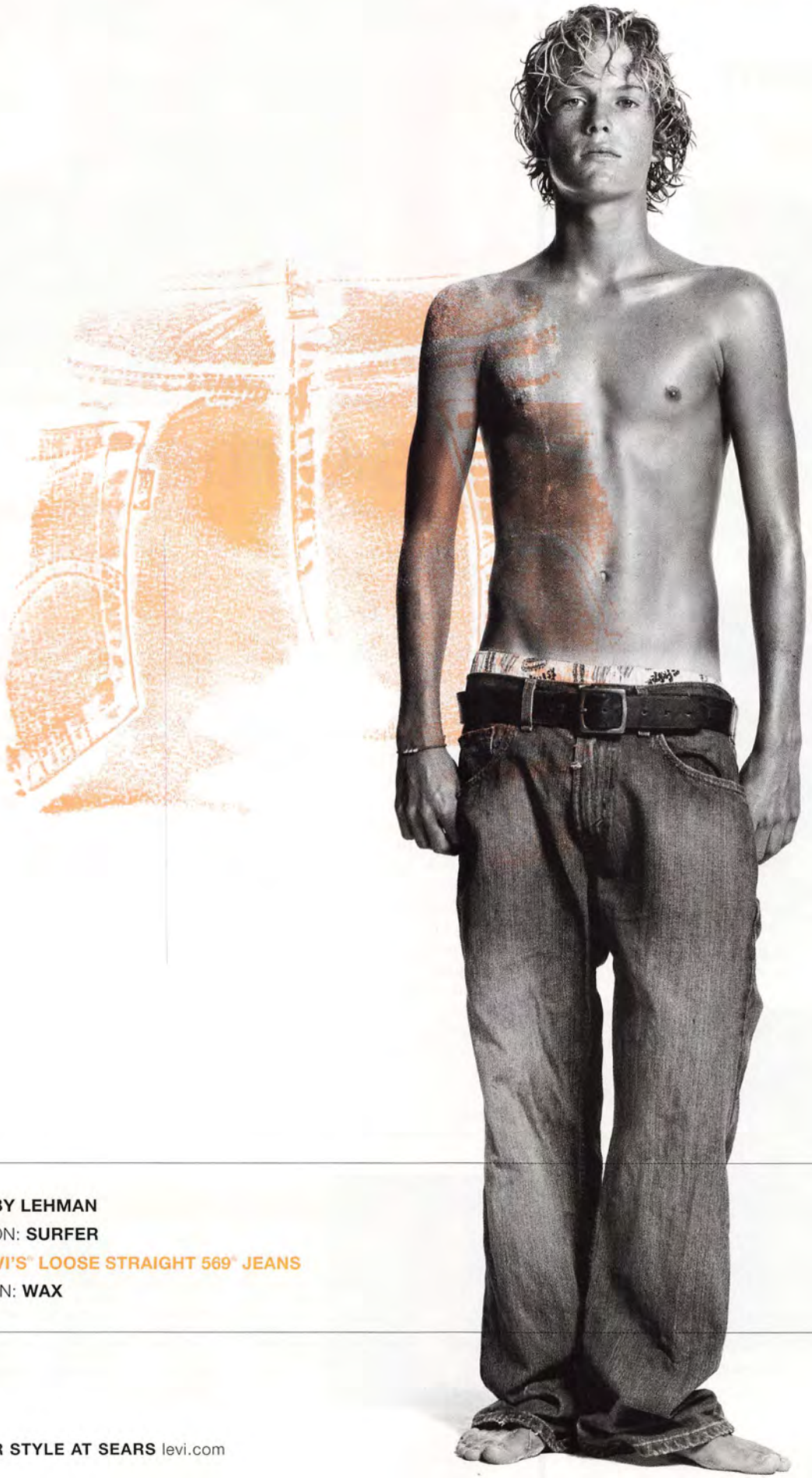
A STYLE FOR EVERY STORY™



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BUSY! BUSY!

Life's a hectic whirl for **Britney Spears**'s fiancé, former dancer **Kevin Federline.** Or is it?

1 Federline escapes the strains of being a high-profile boyfriend.

2 At an L.A. golf course, kitted out in his trademark wife-beater and hat, he lines up a putt.

3 Then he takes a "time out" to stroll about. *That's* better!

NEWS ROUNDUP!

SNOOP DOGG is being sued for $1 million by music promoter **PATRICIA ANN RICHARDSON**, who accuses him of tricking her into picking up three packages of marijuana from a motel. She said she was unaware they contained illegal substances.

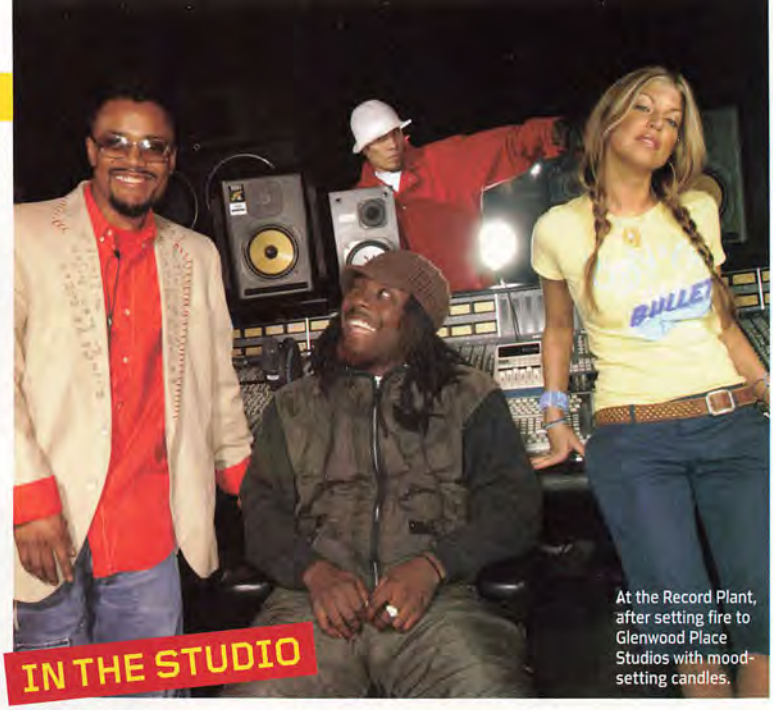
Following her Broadway success in *Rent*, former Spice Girl **MEL B** is planning a comeback. If no labels are interested, her new music might be made available on the Internet. "She's written a lot of new material in her kitchen," a friend said.

Polyphonic Spree percussionist **BRIAN TEASLEY** caused a major security alert at Dallas International Airport. Five gates were closed and bomb experts called when a homemade microphone in his luggage was mistaken for a bomb.

WORD!

"You're going to get cancer writing this way about Justin."

CAMERON DIAZ, SCOLDING A JOURNALIST FOR DISSING HER MAN



At the Record Plant, after setting fire to Glenwood Place Studios with mood-setting candles.

IN THE STUDIO

"It's Dirtier"

That's how the Black Eyed Peas describe their follow-up to *Elephunk*

★ "I'M MISERABLE IN L.A.," Black Eyed Peas front man Will Adams, 29, says. "There are too many vices here — friends, clubs, bad habits."

There's also the small matter of a fire that blazed through Glenwood Place Studios, where the band have been recording, destroying $500,000 worth of equipment. The band had forgotten to blow out some candles. "Classic instruments collected from our travels were destroyed," Adams says.

Formed a decade ago around a nucleus of Adams, Allen Pineda, 30, and Jamie Gomez, 29, the band spent years honing their "consciousness-raising" rap before recording.

When they finally did, they released 1998's *Behind the Front* and 2000's *Bridging the Gap*, which sold fewer than 500,000 copies worldwide. After overcoming depression, Adams enrolled new member Stacy Ferguson, 29.

Suddenly, everything clicked. In 2003, *Elephunk*'s first single "Where Is the Love," with Justin Timberlake, took off, and sold six million copies.

"I was afraid the fame would spoil us," Adams says, "so we didn't take off between records. In that time, everything could have changed. We're still humble."

If *Elephunk*'s sprawling,occasionally hippy style brought to mind a *Sesame Street* version of the Fugees, *Monkey Business*, Adams promises, will be more cohesive and "dirtier."

"People may complain it sounds the same, but, hey, you can't please all the motherfuckers all the time, can you?" NICK DUERDEN

ALL ABOUT OUR ALBUM!

ARTIST: Black Eyed Peas

STUDIO: Glenwood Place Studios, Los Angeles; Metropolis, London

PRODUCER: Will Adams (aka WILL.I.AM)

LAST RECORD: *Elephunk* (A&M, 2003)

NEW RECORD: *Monkey Business* (DUE NOVEMBER)

ALSO IN THE STUDIO

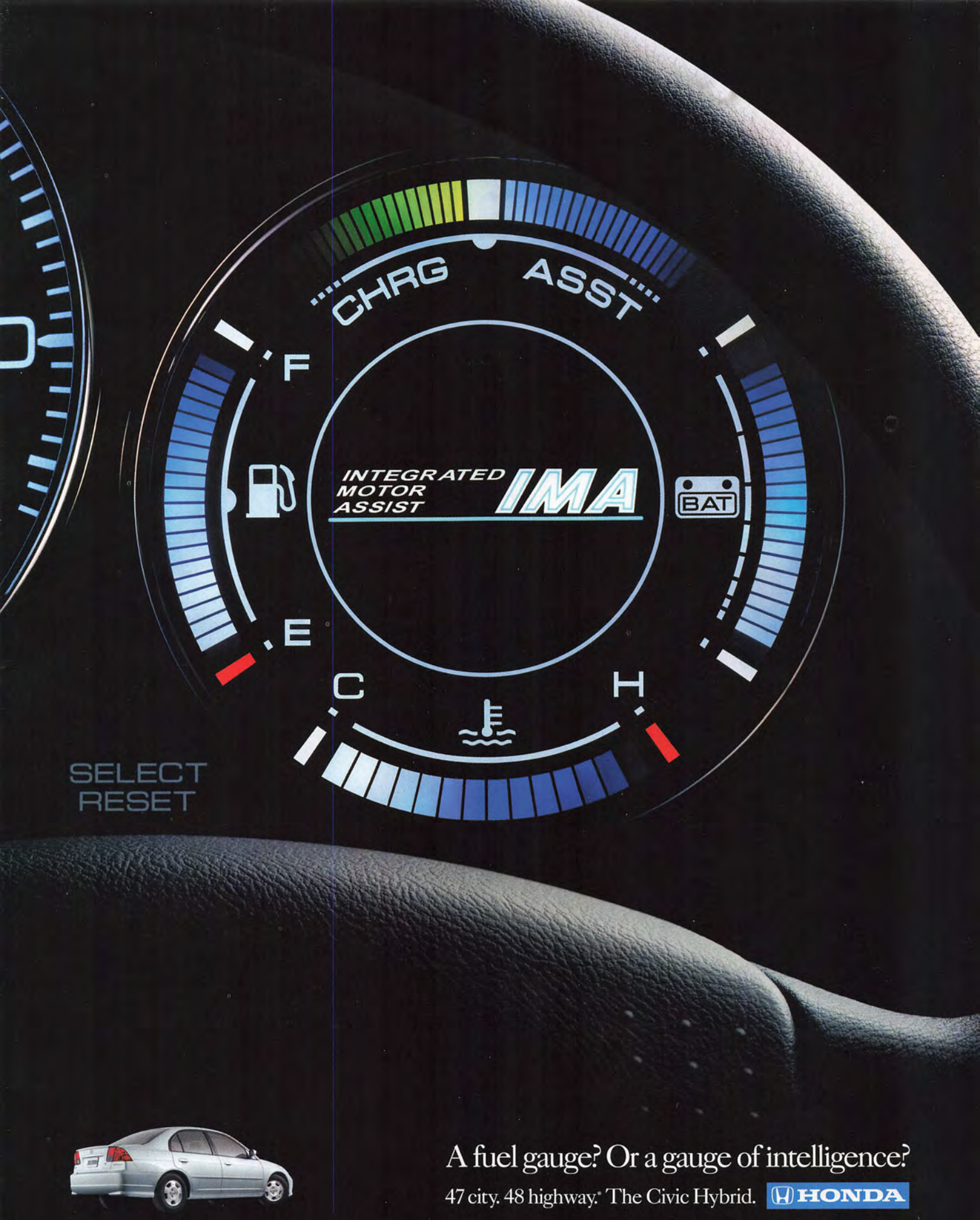
<< Rap icons **PUBLIC ENEMY** are recording their latest album, *How to Sell Soul to a Soul-less People Who Sold Their Soul*, due 2005.

Swedish rockers **SOUNDTRACK OF OUR LIVES** are self-producing *Origins Part 1*, due 2005, at Svenska Grammofon Studion.

DANDY WARHOLS are at the Oddi-torium in Portland recording the follow-up to 2003's *Welcome to the Monkey House*.

Singer-songwriter **AIMEE MANN** is at Sound Factory in Los Angeles with producer Joe Henry, recording *King of the Jailhouse*, due 2005.

Gregg DeGuire/Wireimage.com (Britney Spears); Splash News (Kevin Federline, 3); Zach Cordner (Black Eyed Peas); John Ricard/ Retna Ltd. (Public Enemy). For the Black Eyed Peas, hair: Frankie Payne; makeup: Liz Buenrostro



A fuel gauge? Or a gauge of intelligence?

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USEFUL TIPS FROM THE STARS!

HOW TO...

Take a Punch!

After a notorious beatdown from Godsmack roadies, nerds-turned-punk-rock-stars **Story of the Year** explain how to absorb a bully's fist.

Story of the Year, clockwise from left: Josh Wills, Philip Sneed, Dan Marsala, Adam Russell and Ryan Phillips

BY STEVE KANDELL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATTHEW SALACUSE

1 ASSUME POSITION!

DAN MARSALA, SINGER: "Make sure your head is pinned to the ground so there's no room for it to snap back – the rear portion of your skull absorbs punches better than the face. If you're outnumbered, don't hog all the glory: Let your friends get punched, too."

2 EARN PITY!

RYAN PHILLIPS, GUITARIST: "If you're gonna get hit, milk the humiliation for sympathy. But if your nemesis isn't 100 pounds bigger than you, it won't work. No chick will feel sorry for anyone who's been beaten up by a dude who looks like Doogie Howser."

3 KICK TO IMPRESS!

ADAM RUSSELL, BASSIST: "Before taking a punch that could hurt more than your feelings, try at least one jump kick – that way, you'll keep your street cred with any Chuck Norris fans watching. Also, it'll seem like you actually fought back. Like a man."

4 GET EVEN!

JOSH WILLS, DRUMMER: "If a jock punches you, don't involve the police, especially the ones with those handlebar mustaches. They will find a way to make it your fault. Instead, go rent *Commando* and plan your sweet revenge on the bad guys."

Grooming: Wendy Brown

→ STORY OF THE YEAR'S NEW ALBUM, *PAGE AVENUE* (ASWMRECK), IS OUT NOW.

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Milds Box, 10 mg. "tar", 0.9 mg. nicotine av. per cigarette by FTC method. The amount of tar and nicotine you get from this product varies depending on how you smoke it. There is no such thing as a safe cigarette. For more information visit **www.bwtarnic.com**

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OOPS!

Almost 800 lbs. of poo lands on tourists in Chicago. Is the **Dave Matthews Band** to blame?

1 In August, 100 tourists take an architectural tour of Chicago by boat.

2 The Dave Matthews Band's tour bus, on its way to pick up the guys at their hotel, drives over a bridge and empties its septic tank.

3 Over 800 lbs. of human waste lands in the boat and the river. The poo-soaked tourists are given refunds.

4 The State of Illinois sues the band for $70,000. The band, denying the driver was involved, offers to provide DNA samples. *VICTORIA DESILVERIO*

NEWS ROUNDUP!

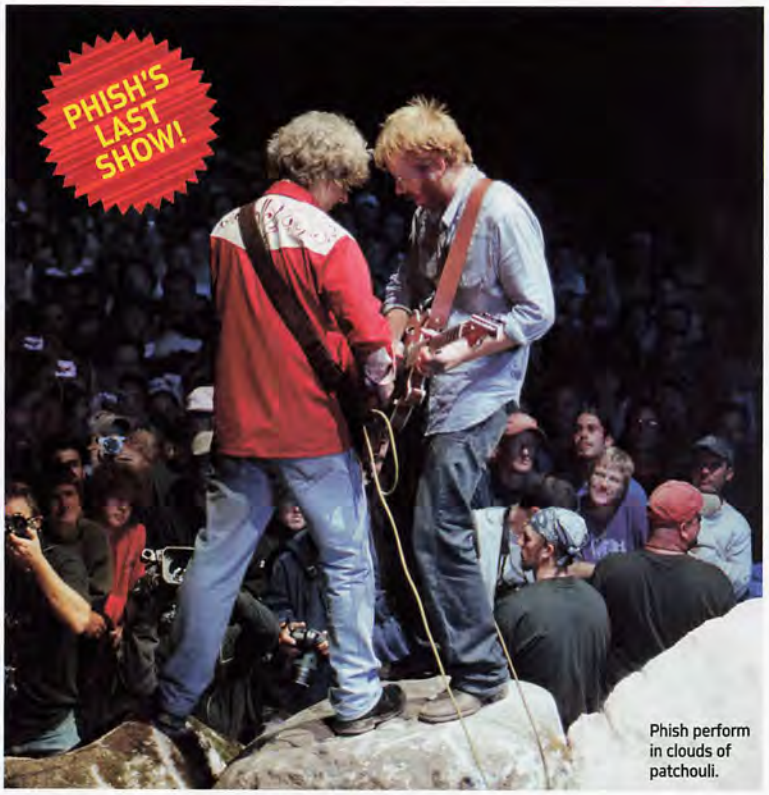
LIL' KIM has called the conspiracy, perjury and obstruction charges against her a "witch hunt against the hip-hop industry." Prosecutors claim she lied on the stand by saying her former manager DAMION BUTLER was not present at a 2001 shooting incident between her posse and that of FOXY BROWN.

Director GUS VAN SANT has finished shooting a movie based on the last days of Kurt Cobain. *Final Days* stars MICHAEL PITT, recently seen in M. NIGHT SHYAMALAN's *The Village*.

KRIST NOVOSELIC has released a book called *Of Grunge and Government: Let's Fix This Broken Democracy!*, combining a memoir of his Nirvana days with his radical views on electoral reform.

WORD!

"A dildo."
BRITNEY SPEARS, ON THE LAST THING SHE HAD IN HER MOUTH



Phish perform in clouds of patchouli.

Farewell

Almost 60,000 Phish fans brave knee-deep mud to say good-bye

★ AFTER 1,450 LIVE performances and 7 million albums sold, legendary jam-band Phish finished its 21-year career on top, playing its final two shows before 60,000 dedicated fans in Coventry, Vermont, a small town near the Canadian border.

But weeklong rains and bog-like conditions nearly turned the historical sendoff, which was simulcast live to multiple U.S. cities August 14 and 15, into a fiasco.

Mud rendered the parking lots on the 600-acre plot impassable, and event organizers were forced to turn away thousands of fans who had paid $150 a ticket. Undeterred by the gate closures and police warnings to turn around, over 6,000 fans left their cars stranded alongside Interstate 91.

World's largest hacky-sack convention.

"There were cars everywhere! They were on the right shoulder, the left shoulder, the grass in-between," Steven Trachtenbroit, 27, a fan from New York who has attended 76 Phish concerts, said. "I know people who walked 32 miles to get to the concert after waiting for 35 hours in traffic. But they were so excited to see Phish, they didn't care."

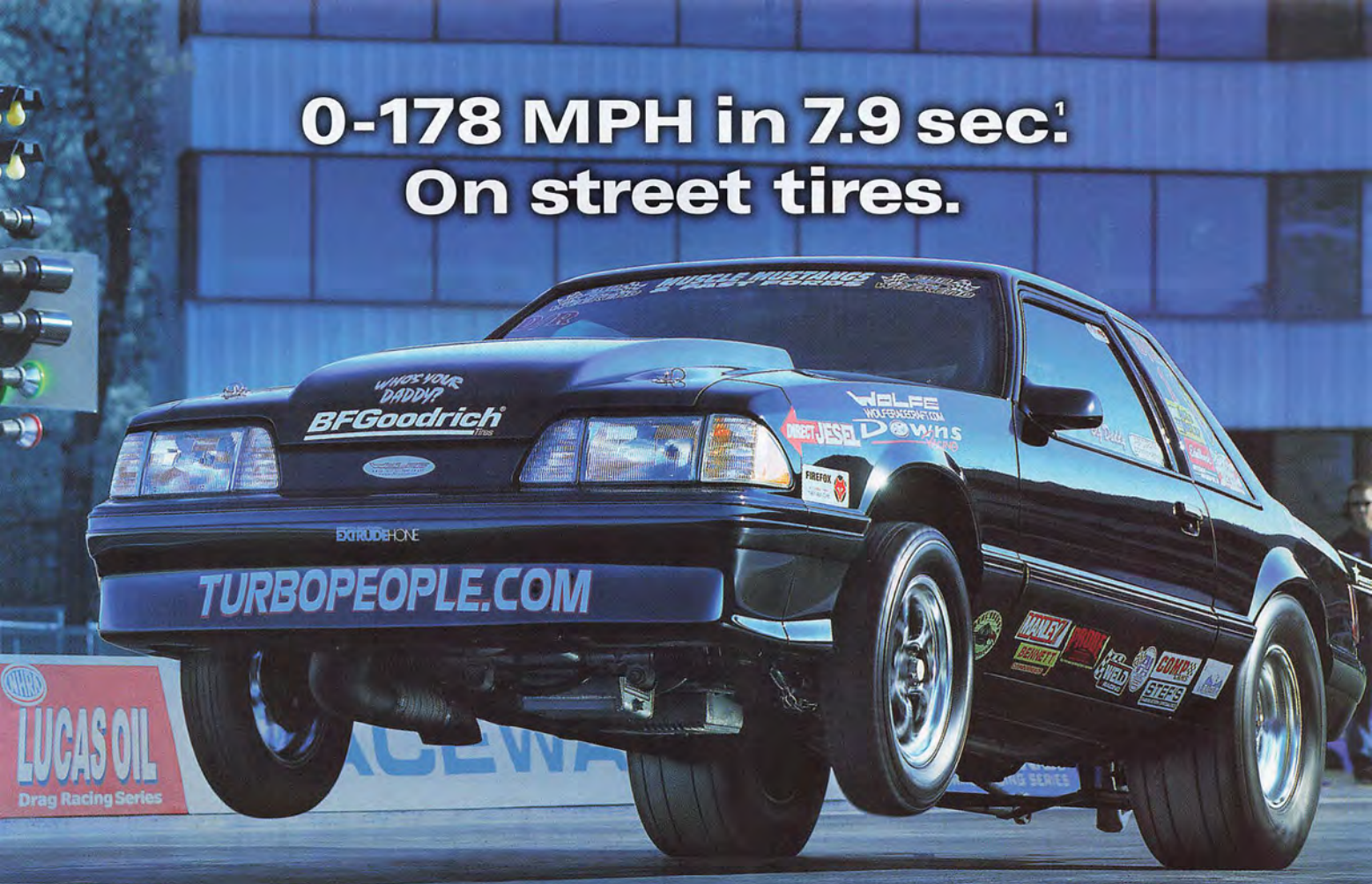
Phish played six sets, each almost two hours long, over two days, finishing at 12:25 A.M. Monday with the aptly titled "The Curtain With . . . ."

"The song ironically contains the line, 'Please, we have no regrets,'" Jeff Enchura, 27, a chef from New Jersey who has attended 43 Phish concerts, said. "The band was so emotional they played it in the wrong key and had to play it over."

"For 10 minutes after," Trachtenbroit said, "there was complete silence and thousands of people held up lighters in tribute. Thinking about it still gives me the chills." *CHUCK MINDENHALL*

Left: John Jay Cabuay (illustrations, 4); Right: C. Taylor Crothers (2)

0-178 MPH in 7.9 sec.[1] On street tires.



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1- Dwayne "Big Daddy" Gutridge made a pass at 7.98 seconds on January 29, 2004 at a track in Bradenton, Florida. Because this was not set during a race, it is not an official world record.

2- Domestic: Dwayne "Big Daddy" Gutridge 8.05 @ 181 MPH on 11/23/03. Import: Paul Efantis 8.25 @ 170.9 MPH on 10/05/03.

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WACKO JACKO WATCH!

CREEPY

Tape of a scared child's voice entered as evidence for trial

IN A PRETRIAL hearing in Michael Jackson's child-molestation case, an investigator testified he had discovered a suspicious recording of an unidentified child's voice saying into a phone, "I've got to go, somebody's coming." The tape was seized from a safe in a bathroom at Jackson's Neverland Ranch.

This recording is among the 39 pieces of evidence taken from Neverland that Judge Rodney Melville has deemed admissible to the trial, which begins January 31. Although defense for Jackson argues officials exceeded the scope of their warrant in last November's raid, the judge is said to be "concerned" with around 12 of the items taken.

Meanwhile, German surgeon Werner Mang claimed he saved Jackson's nose from collapse. By taking tissue from his ear and placing it on his nose, he repaired damage from rhinoplasty. "[His] nose is now fine," he said.

Jackson is now house-hunting in the tiny European principality of Lichtenstein. *STEVE LOWE*

OBITS

LAURA BRANIGAN, 47, Aug. 26, in Quogue, NY, of a brain aneurysm. Best known for '80s hits "Gloria" and "Self Control," the pop star, who started out as a backing singer for Leonard Cohen, turned to acting, with roles in the TV series *CHiPs*, films *Mugsy's Girl* and *Backstage* and Broadway's *Love, Janis*.

ELMER BERNSTEIN, 82, Aug. 18, in Ojai, CA. Oscar-winning composer scored over 200 films, including *The Ten Commandments*, *The Magnificent Seven*, *Meatballs* and *Ghostbusters*. Made pop charts in U.S. and U.K. with his music.

D-ROC (DENNIS MILES), 45, in Duarte, CA, of lymphoma. The hockey-mask-wearing guitarist in Ice-T's rap-metal group Body Count, Miles is the third member of Body Count to die: Drummer Beatmaster V passed away in 1996 and bassist Mooseman in 2000.

SACHA DISTEL, 71, July 22, in France, after a long illness. This French crooner had a string of hits in the '60s and '70s, including his version of "Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head," which became an international hit. Also a composer, he wrote Tony Bennett's "The Good Life."

WHERE'S COURTNEY?

In court again, Love pleaded "not guilty" to assault of her ex-boyfriend/manager's girlfriend with a liquor bottle and flashlight outside her ex's L.A. home.

LIFE AFTER ROCK

On their 1989 tour, there were "40 cities and 40 girls" for Yella.

DJ Yella

OF N.W.A

THEN!
MEMBER OF N.W.A, 1986–1991

NOW!
DIRECTOR/PORNOGRAPHER LOS ANGELES, CA

★ "ME AND DR. DRE started as club DJs and making records for the World Class Wreckin' Cru. Shortly after, we formed N.W.A. People thought our tours would be crazy. They were fun, but not too wild. We thought about it as a business. We drank, but we never did drugs, not even weed. As far as groupies go, let me [say this]: On the 1989 tour, there were 40 cities and 40 girls.

"I don't like to brag, but I guess we started gangsta rap. People were cussing on records, but when *we* cussed, the F.B.I. sent us a letter. That's when it really started.

"I think N.W.A broke up when outside people influenced members. It wasn't that we were cheated. I mean, Dre had a $1 million house, so did Eazy-E.

"In 1993, a buddy of mine talked to Eazy about getting into porn. He didn't jump on it, but I did. I bought cameras and taught myself how to shoot and edit. I've made at least 300 movies. I never perform; you might see my hand, but that's about it.

"I financed my company with royalties; it took about 10 grand. There haven't been too many mishaps because I approach it like I did N.W.A — as a business. I'm probably the fastest shooter. I edit it myself, so I know what I need.

"I WANT MY PORN TO LOOK NATURAL."

"I want my stuff to look natural, which is why I shoot gonzo. It's not like a girl in a maid outfit trying to get some milk. None of that corny shit.

"Porn is a funny business. You're never gonna make money like you can in music. There's a big difference between selling a million albums and 3,000 pornos." *AS TOLD TO RANDY HABEREK*

Clockwise from top left: Nick Ut-Pool/Getty Images; Derek Ridgers/LFI; Gary French (illustration); Fred Prouser-Pool/Getty Images/Newscom.com

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20 SONGS YOU MUST DOWNLOAD THIS MONTH

1 Nelly feat. Christina Aguilera
"Tilt Ya Head Back" *UNIVERSAL*
Mr. and Mrs. Dirrty swap sexed-up come-ons on this "Superfly"-sampling duet.

2 The Donnas
"Fall Behind Me" *ATLANTIC*
When some homewrecker tries to edge in on Donna A.'s man, she retaliates with this blistering battle cry.

3 Lil Jon and the East Side Boyz feat. Lil Scrappy
"What You Gon' Do" *TVT*
The crunk king returns with the most smackin'-any-bitch-ass-nigga-who-acts-up-in-the-club track of the year.

4 Dogs Die In Hot Cars
"I Love You 'Cause I Have To" *V2*
Scottish ska-punk about videogames and noncommittal romance, fleshed out with '80s synths and a wheezing organ.

5 The Pixies
"Ain't That Pretty At All" *ARTEMIS*
A funny song about numbness and self-loathing, this juiced-up Warren Zevon cover recalls the Pixies' howling youth.

6 Beanie Sigel feat. Cam'Ron
"Wanted (On the Run)" *ROC-A-FELLA*
On trial for attempted murder, Jay-Z's chubby homey enlists Cam'Ron — and a Bon Jovi sample — to make his case.

7 Mannie Fresh
"Real Big" *CASH MONEY/UNIVERSAL*
An ode to a ride so obscenely pimped it has a microwave and a fishtank in the dash.

8 Neko Case
"Train from Kansas City" *ANTI-/EPITAPH*
The 1965 Shangri-La's B-side about a Bread Basket love triangle gets an alt-country makeover.

9 De La Soul
"The Grind Date" *SANCTUARY URBAN*
Hip-hop's veteran motivational speakers return with this funked-out, street-survival anthem.

10 TV On the Radio
"New Health Rock" *TOUCH AND GO*
Infectious dance rock for uncoordinated art students.

11 Dem Franchise Boys
"White Tees" *UNIVERSAL*
Forget Burberry and Gucci — for these Dirty South newbies, it gets no more gangsta than Hanes.

R.E.M.: "No, Peter, you can't stop practicing."

Amazing fact: M.I.A. doesn't actually work in a complaints department.

TV on the Radio: Note sly bird-flip from dude in the middle.

12 Keyshia Cole feat. Shyne
"I Changed My Mind" *A&M*
With assists from rap's hottest inmate, Shyne, and producer Kanye West, this doe-eyed songstress gives her boy the boot.

13 U2
"Vertigo" *INTERSCOPE*
Mile-wide choruses and canyon-carving riffs from Ireland's Gods of Meaningfulness.

14 R.E.M.
"Leaving New York" *WARNER BROS.*
This bittersweet breakup meditation can double as an unwitting anthem for the thousands who fled the RNC.

15 The Good Life
"Album of the Year" *SADDLE CREEK*
Sweet, acoustic-guitar driven emo with none of the whining and all of the unrequited love.

16 Terror Squad feat. Lil Jon, Eminem & Mase
"Lean Back (Remix)" *SRC/UNIVERSAL*
The King of Crunk dials up a synth remake while Eminem shouts out Harlem and Mase gets pious.

17 The Ike Reilly Assassination
"I Don't Want What You Got (Goin' On)" *ROCK RIDGE*
Word-smitten pop gets fed through a Beck-indebted country-hop filter.

18 M.I.A.
"Galang" *XL*
This Sri Lankan-born beauty lays knotted crime tales over a grimy, glitchy dancehall stomp.

19 Nas
"You Know My Style" *COLUMBIA*
From the scholar's thug, a popping, locking and grinding electro track.

20 Old 97's
"Won't be Home" *NEW WEST*
An alt-rock toast to the drifter's life, featuring a failed romance set in a car.

ICON KEY

SADDOES
HIPSTERS
RAWK
AGING HIPSTERS
CRUNKY
SUPERSTAR POP

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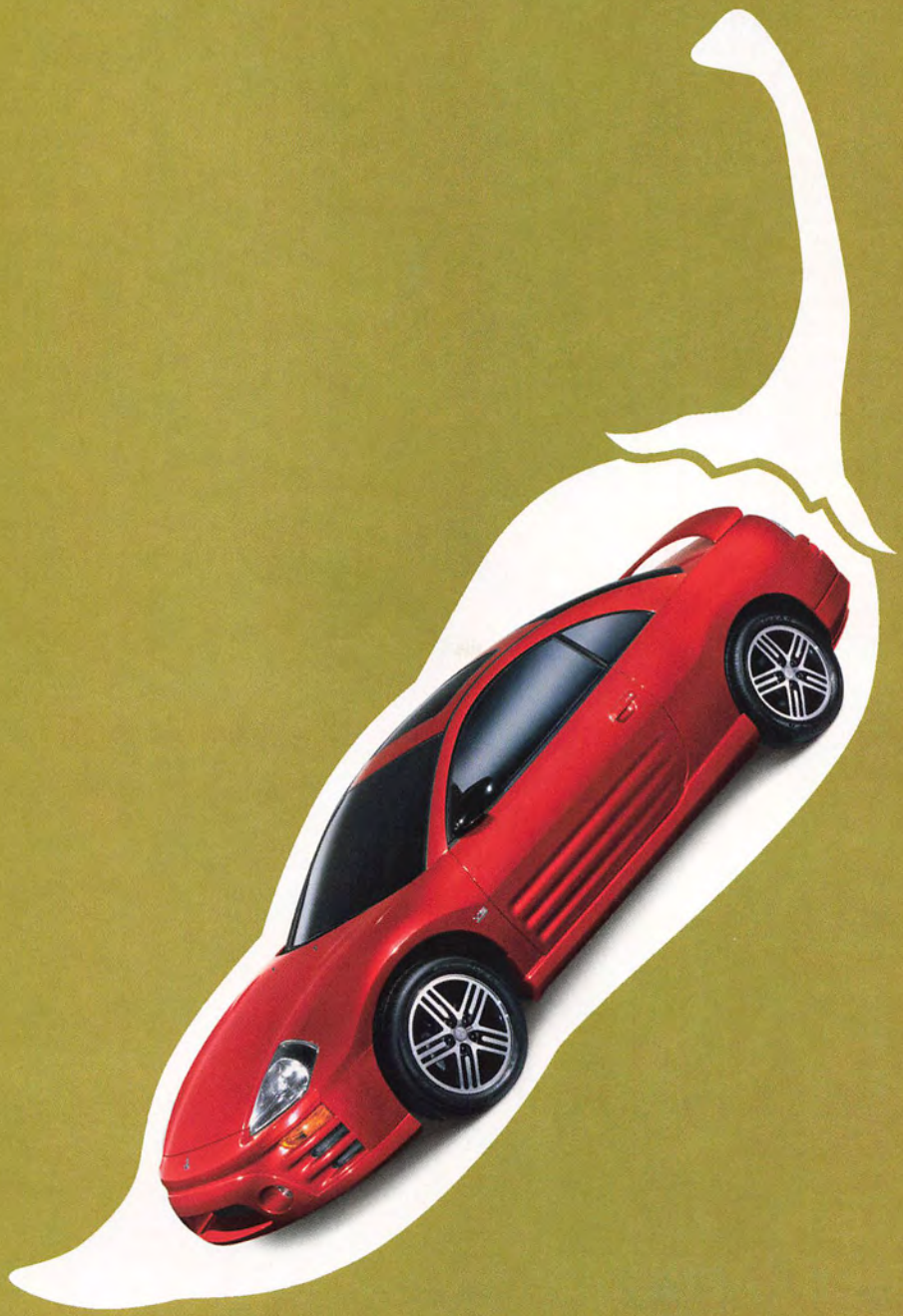
Note: Not all of these songs are legally available for download — yet. In those instances, *Blender* encourages you to buy the original CD. David Titlow (M.I.A.); Michael Schmelling/Retna Ltd. (TV On the Radio)



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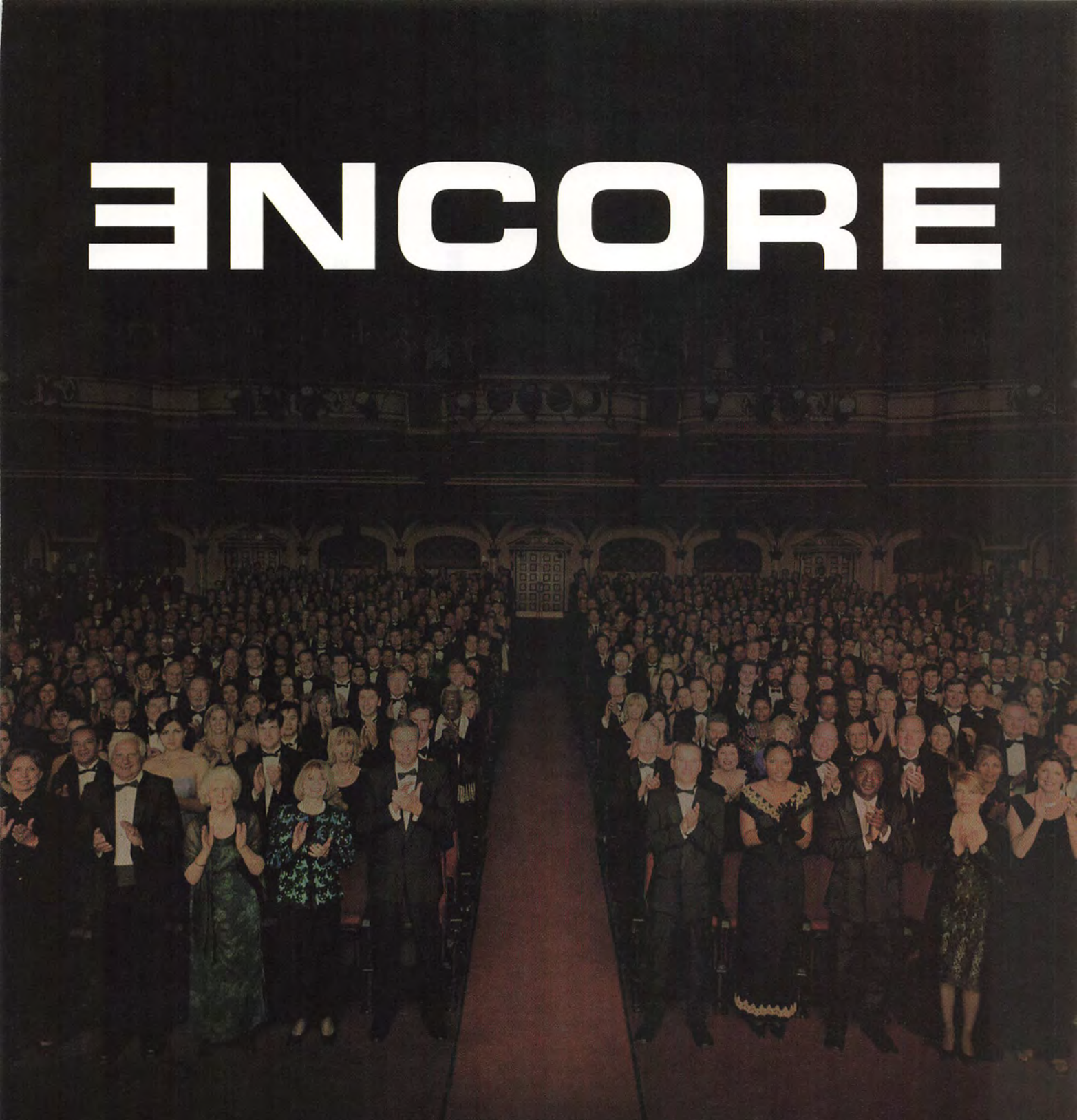

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LL Cool J

The rap icon answers your questions about drugs, fighting and . . . the craziest thing he's ever had licked off his abs!

BY JONAH WEINER

LL COOL J LOOKS STRANGE. Fresh from a TV interview here at Def Jam's Manhattan office, his face is powdered and his eyes are watery, presumably from the glare of the camera crew's bright lights. Treating *Blender* to the strongest handshake we've ever experienced, the ironman MC resembles nothing so much as a mime on steroids. It's been a full day of press engagements for the 36-year-old rap legend, but he bounds into the room, beaming behind his makeup, ready for action.

A recording star since he was 16 — when he dropped his 1984 debut single, "I Need a Beat" — James Todd Smith is rap's most indefatigable hero.

With eight platinum plaques, numerous Hollywood cameos and a network sitcom on his résumé, he boasts the genre's most fruitful long-term career. Now, with *The Definition* (it's album number 11, for those keeping score), the Queens-born MC shows no signs of stopping; the crunk-influenced lead single "Headsprung" has become one of his biggest hits yet.

"You're gonna have to speak up, homes."

"This is my last interview today," LL says. But it won't be his easiest: 20 years' worth of fans means 20 years worth of fans' questions. Mr. Smith, there are some things we'd like to know. . . .

When did you lose your virginity?

K MITCHELL, ALBUQUERQUE, NM

I was 13. I loved her, I don't know if she loved me. It wasn't traumatic, but it was . . . brief. I had to abandon ship pretty quickly! "Ladies Love" [the "LL" in LL Cool J] was really my fantasy. There were no real ladies hanging off me. None. But there were a lot in here (*points to his head*).

Does LL Cool J stand for anything else besides "Ladies Love Cool James"?

DARCMATTER, WACO, TX

I had a lot, it was ridiculous: "Long and Lean," "Legend in Leather," "quick Like Lightning."

If you were elected president, what's the first thing you'd do?

FRANZHIND88, HUNTINGTON BEACH, CA

Give everybody a piece of Iraq. Let's be real: It's a pizza now. If we give France or Germany a bigger slice, if we give various countries a piece, we can get more of our troops out, hopefully stabilize the region, and move forward with our lives. I'm split between Bush and Kerry. I'm a swing voter!

What posters did you have on your wall as a kid?

TOBEY_ROPE, NYACK, NY

Run-DMC, Eric B. & Rakim, Public Enemy, Whodini, the Beastie Boys. It's weird: Since I started rapping so young, I grew up on artists who came out after me. I had Bruce Lee posters, too. The way he fought, walked, his vibe — Bruce was the man.

How much can you bench-press? You were freakin' cut in *S.W.A.T.*!

NEWWASHBADBOY, NEW WASHINGTON, IN

The most I've ever lifted was 405. After that, I felt like a retard. That's going balls to the wall, max. My bodyguard can lift 495. It's ridiculous.

How did the violence in your childhood affect you later in life?

THA_GAMEZ_OVA, SAVANNAH, GA

I saw my mother get shot. I was a little boy, 4 years old, but I remember it vividly: It was the middle of the night, and I heard →

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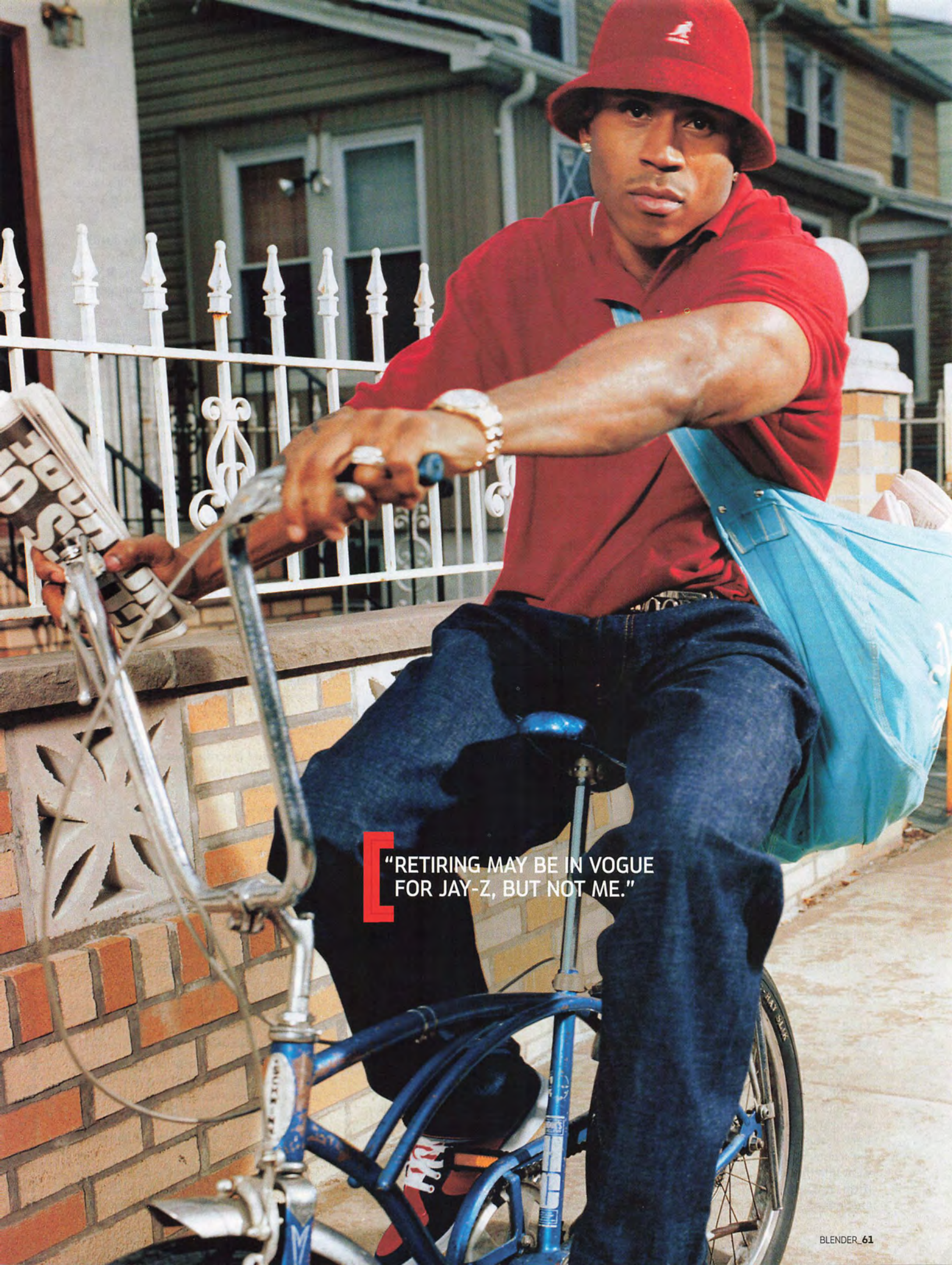
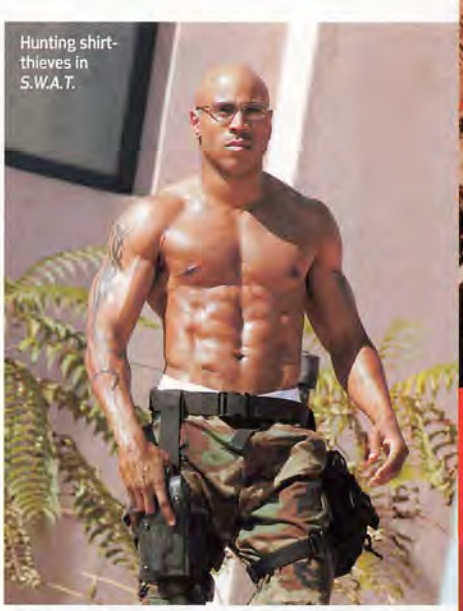
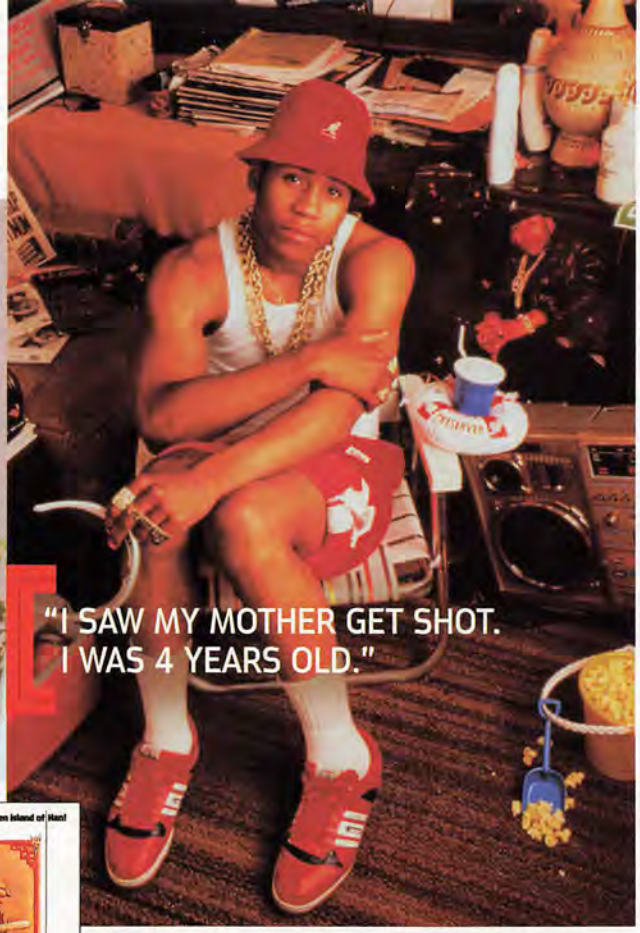
Janette Beckman. Opposite page: Ben Watts/Corbis Outline



"RETIRING MAY BE IN VOGUE FOR JAY-Z, BUT NOT ME."


Hunting shirt-thieves in *S.W.A.T.*


"I SAW MY MOTHER GET SHOT. I WAS 4 YEARS OLD."

moaning. I woke up, walked into the kitchen, and saw my mother laying in a pool of her own blood. My dad was outside in a car, still firing a shotgun, and I just heard [thudding noises]. My mother was in the hospital for a year. I didn't know it was my father [who had shot her] until years later. I have a very different type of family. I learned two things that night. One, you can get past anything, no matter how severe. Two, you never know what can happen.

← Bruce Lee *really* overcompensating on *Enter the Dragon* poster.

You lived on the subway when you were a teen. What are the rules of survival for sleeping on trains?

GYROSKOPIC, SALEM, OR

Man, have some food with you and have an extra jacket. Move from train to train, and make sure you wake up before it ends up in the yard! Around the time my first single came out, my grandmother said, "If you're not gonna go to school, you have to get out." The money had died down, so I took the trains for three weeks.

Why were you such a bully in school?

CHATTERBOXX, HACKENSACK, NJ

I had a lot of fights — but everyone had a lot of fights where I come from. Bullies are people who pick on other people; I was more of a prankster — thumbtack in your seat, pull your chair out when you sit down. I got all the keys to the school, and we went into this electrical crawlspace and looked through the vents into the girls' bathroom. I was crazy.

What was the best thing about having two hits when you're still in high school?

FREDDYFLIPOUT, BLUE HILL, ME

Having access to all the girls and all the money and jewelry and cars. The first single I recorded was "I Need a Beat," and I walked around the halls with it for a couple weeks, real proud, but guys started getting jealous. So I threw a concert in shop class one day, and never went back.

What is the craziest thing someone has ever licked off your abs?

J. MARTINEZ, SALINAS, CA

(*Laughing*) Two things: A couple of boxes of Jell-O in a tub of cold water, and chocolate syrup. That's the craziest. Ain't like it's gonna be spaghetti sauce. I don't think the beef bouillon's gonna fly.

Your own hotness excluded, what's the best hip-hop single of all time?

HOWZITBE, GLENS FALLS, ID

My mood's always changing, but right now I'd have to say "California Love," by Dr. Dre and Tupac. That is cookin'. In a positive sense, Tupac was the gang leader of a generation of boys without fathers who related to the streets. He was human, he had incredible charisma and a voice like a preacher.

You've toured with Run-DMC, the Beastie Boys, R. Kelly. Who's the biggest prankster?

BREEZYFOSHEEZY, TULSA, OK

Me. I'm the best. The most disgusting thing I ever did was when I had my man do a little number-two action on the bed of one of the guys in my crew. He did it right underneath the stretched sheet, then put it back all nice and neat. He came into his room and he couldn't figure out what it was.

What happened between you and Jamie Foxx on the set of *Any Given Sunday*? Have you spoken since?

NOODLESOUP, MIAMI BEACH, FL

We were both amped-up from lifting weights, playing football. I pushed him, and I was acting — but he thought that I was serious. So he hit me. But I've seen him since, and we're cool. We've shared love.

If you could inscribe your own gravestone, what would it say?

XHOLIOX, OAK PARK, IL

"I'll be back," with a smiley face.

Is porn bad for your soul?

C_FELIX, TALLAHASSEE, FL

I guess Biblically, in terms of my religion, it is. But to sit here and say that I've never watched it — that'd be a lie. I was never the guy with a thousand tapes, and I didn't go to the conventions. But I used to watch a tape once every two days. I didn't have a favorite porn star; I loved the whole genre!

My boyfriend and I could use some serious spice in the bedroom — any recommendations, LL?

TRANITASMITH, BROOKLYN, NY

Get yourself a brand new shower curtain, throw it on the bed, squeeze some baby oil all over that joint, and do a little slip and slide. I have done that many times.

Do you ever have sex with your hat on?

PRECIOUS_STONEZ, WICHITA, KS

Oh yeah! I might have some socks on, too. With the muscles and the tattoos, that's a funny image! But, seriously, you have to →

Clockwise from top left: The Everett Collection; Deborah Feingold/Corbis Outline; Alphonse Telymonde (2)

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keep your wife on the Ps and Qs. You can't always be mellow with it. Sometimes you have to take a swig and turn your hat backward.

How many hats do you have, and how do you organize them all?

TYGRIS_9000, HARTFORD, CT

I used to have thousands. Hats are like my security blanket. The only time I take 'em off is when I do movies. Now it's only hundreds, though, 'cause I give 'em away. Funny thing, though: I never saw a dime from Kangol. I was a young boy, I didn't know I was gonna single-handedly get a company to blow up.

When are you gonna make your retirement album, *à la* Jay-Z?

MYDROMASH_Z, MOUNT JULIET, TN

Why do that? What's cool about retiring? I can go for as long as people are feeling me. I just made a record, "Headsprung," and sonically shocked people. Retiring may be in vogue to Jay-Z, but not to me. He'll be back. All it's gonna do is make first-week sales bigger on the comeback.

When's the *In the House* DVD coming? Am I the first person to ever ask you about that?

J.J. RHYS.BROWN, ANN ARBOR, MI

You're absolutely the first person to ask me that, and I have no idea! (*Breaks into hysterical laughter*) You know, I did four seasons of that show, and I can't even remember an episode. I need that person's phone number, though: That's a good idea!

With Jamie Foxx and Al Pacino in *Any Given Sunday*.

"I USED TO WATCH A PORN TAPE EVERY TWO DAYS. I LOVED THE WHOLE GENRE!"

When did you give up drugs, and why?

CANDELABRO98727, LARAMIE, WY

I didn't need to give 'em up. I just experimented with them as a young boy. One time I was with my friends and we'd smoked a little weed, and we went to the movie theater. This dude was standing next to me ordering movie tickets, and I was frightened! Petrified! I said, "You know what, I don't need this."

My name is Eleanor Darling, and I need a cool stage name for my music career. Can you please come up with one for me?

RIGASPRATS, PLATTSBURGH, NY

You know, I agonized over changing my name from J-Ski to LL Cool J. How about El-D? Or Big Ellie!

What's the blingiest thing in your house?

TRIEDNTRUE, COLUMBUS, OH

I had a movie theater put in. It's really nice, seats about 30 people. It cost a little bit.

Describe a typical daddy's day out with your kids?

BELINDAZE, PORT JEFFERSON, NY

Movies, basketball, hanging out. I have a son and three daughters — they're into basketball, too. I'll take my son to kickboxing, watch him break some people down, watch him spar. He's 14 and can submit a grown man. He's got that UFC action going!

Do you think it's a compliment that my best friend Suesan calls her vibrator LL Cool J?

HEATHERBELLE654, SOUTH BEND, IN

Absolutely! Glad I could be of service. [BLENDER]

Clockwise from top left: Steve Granitz/WireImage.com; Ben Watts/Corbis Outline; Chris Deeber/Globe Photos

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The Message

Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five's gritty account of ghetto life won them worldwide acclaim — and sowed the seeds of their destruction

IN JUNE 1982, Joseph "Grandmaster Flash" Saddler, the DJ and founder of the Bronx-based rap group the Furious Five, was nervous. His group had just recorded their latest single under duress from Sylvia Robinson, the owner of Sugar Hill Records. He had reservations about how this gloomy slice of ghetto life would be received by a hip-hop audience accustomed to party songs.

"I remember one person scared the daylights out of me," Grandmaster Flash admitted a year later. "He said, 'Flash, I've always been your devoted fan, I love you, but I don't like that record.' I just stayed in the house, but Mrs. Robinson said, 'Flash, this is gonna be a big thing.' You gotta respect the woman for her intuition. All of a sudden, she made one dub, boom, that was it: It blew up. 'Like a jungle, like a jungle' on every station."

That line — "It's like a jungle sometimes, it makes me wonder how I keep from going under" — didn't just become the Furious Five's defining lyric: It marked the dawn of social commentary in hip-hop. A worldwide hit at the time, "The Message," two decades later, is the only rap record to be included in the Library of Congress' National Recording Registry. Yet it was the brainchild of a moonlighting percussionist from a rival band, and only featured one member of the Furious Five — MC Melle Mel — ultimately contributing to the tearing apart of the group. Says Grandmaster Flash: "It was the biggest record we ever did, but it was the beginning of the end."

> **"ANYONE WHO HAS A PROBLEM WITH THE SONG IS AN IDIOT."**
> MELLE MEL

If not for Robinson's persistence, "The Message" wouldn't have been recorded at all. Ed "Duke Bootee" Fletcher, a session percussionist for the Sugarhill Gang, came up with the "jungle" line to accompany an African-influenced rhythm track. He took it to Robinson, who detected the germ of a mold-breaking hit that could move hip-hop forward from the frothy party rhymes of records such as the Sugarhill Gang's "Rapper's Delight."

The Furious Five, however, weren't convinced. "Nobody liked the song," Melvin "Melle Mel" Glover says. "It was totally different from what we were doing. Even [Duke Bootee] didn't think much of it. He had two songs, 'The Message' and 'Dumb Love,' and he wanted to do 'Dumb Love.' Sylvia was the only one who really wanted to do 'The Message.' We dodged it for a year or two and then she cornered us."

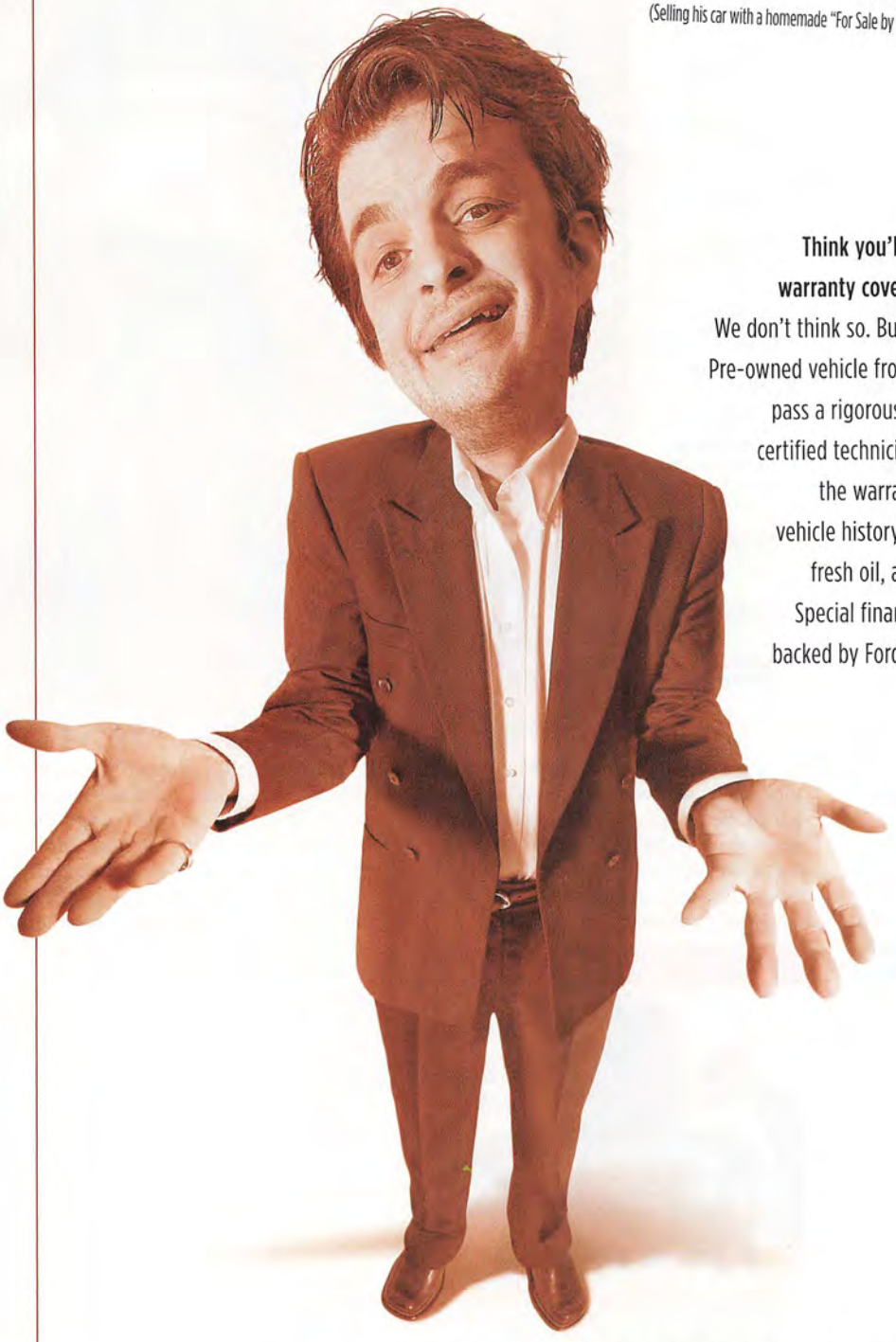
For months, the Furious Five failed to come up with lines to accompany Fletcher's verses and chorus until Robinson picked up on a verse Melle Mel had written three years prior for the "Superrappin' No. 1" single ("A child was born with no state of mind . . .") and asked him to rerecord it for "The Message." Convinced the record only needed two MCs, Robinson tried out Furious Five member Guy "Rahiem" Williams, but ultimately decided against using him on the track. ➔

Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five would live to regret firing their stylist.

Ebet Roberts

"Don't worry. If anything goes wrong, I'll have my cousin Rudy look at it. He's a mechanic, you know."

(Selling his car with a homemade "For Sale by Owner" sign in bank parking lot.)



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The musical inspirations for the dark, documentary-style accounts of poverty and desperation were politically astute funk poets such as Gil Scott-Heron and the Last Poets. Melle Mel's lines about jail were partly drawn from a five-day spell he served at the age of 15 for robbing an undercover policeman dressed as a homeless man. The rest came from what he and Fletcher had seen around them on the streets of the Bronx.

The vocals were laid down in Sugar Hill's studios at 96 West Street in Englewood, New Jersey. "It took maybe a day to cut the track, another day to get the vocal right and maybe three or four days to mix," Melle Mel recalls. "Everybody wanted to come down to the studio to check out how the song was going." The backing track, which had transformed beyond recognition from Duke Bootee's original demo, was assembled by Sugar Hill's house producer Clifton "Jiggs" Chase. His shivering, arcing synthesizer line formed the song's musical spine.

Even at that stage, not everyone shared Robinson's confidence in the song. "It's like there was no middle," Grandmaster Flash explains. "For something like this, the risk factor was so high: Either it was going to be a big hit or it was gonna be a miss."

They realized it would be the former when they heard it played at tastemaking Bronx hotspot Disco Fever. "When they played a record like that to a party crowd and people still partied off it, we knew it was a hit record," Melle Mel says.

"The Message" went gold in 21 days, topped the *Village Voice*'s prestigious "Pazz & Jop Poll," and in November 1982, it peaked at 62 on *Billboard*'s Hot 100 Singles chart.

However, it dealt a death blow to the group's unity. "My biggest problem with that song is the entire Five wasn't on it," Grandmaster Flash says. "That's probably where Sylvia and I started falling out with each other." The Furious Five's subsequent album, also called *The Message*, failed to match the single's success. The following year, Grandmaster Flash sued Sugar Hill for $5 million in unpaid royalties, a move which split the group in two, with Furious Five members Melle Mel, Scorpio and Cowboy in Sugar Hill's corner and Flash, Mel's brother Kidd Creole and Rahiem in the other.

"Some of the guys went to court, and I stayed around trying to make records," Melle Mel says. His explanation for the group's messy demise is simple: "If you don't have money, you're looking around for reasons why you ain't got money, and one of the reasons might have been because we was with a record company that didn't do business right. But another reason was that we was all fucking high. Everybody was coked out."

VITAL STATISTICS

SONG
"The Message"

ARTIST
Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five featuring Melle Mel and Duke Bootee

LABEL
Sugar Hill

PERFORMERS
Ed "Duke Bootee" Fletcher
Vocals

Melvin "Melle Mel" Glover
Vocals

Clifton "Jiggs" Chase
Prophet synthesizer

Sylvia Robinson
Concept, mixing

Keith LeBlanc
Drums

PRODUCER
Clifton "Jiggs" Chase

CHART DEBUT
October 1982

HIGHEST CHART POSITION
62

"Wait — nobody told us it was picture day!"

WHO'S WHO

JOSEPH "GRANDMASTER FLASH" SADDLER
Barbados-born pioneer of scratching, currently operates his own record label, Adrenaline City Entertainment.

MELVIN "MELLE MEL" GLOVER
Furious Five rapper, also heard on Chaka Khan's hit "I Feel For You."

SYLVIA ROBINSON
Cofounder of Sugar Hill Records, her own singing career includes the 1956 number 1 single "Love Is Strange."

ED "DUKE BOOTEE" FLETCHER
Sugar Hill house band percussionist, later became a schoolteacher in Newark, New Jersey.

Ironically, the group's final hit was the anti-cocaine anthem "White Lines (Don't Do It)." A lawsuit over that song's unauthorized use of a bassline from punk-funkers Liquid Liquid helped bankrupt Sugar Hill. But the label's misfortunes didn't end there. In October 2002, the studio at 96 West Street burned down.

Although Flash and Mel reunited in 1988, they remain polarized over the hit. "'The Message' wasn't one of my favorites," Grandmaster Flash maintains. "What [Robinson] wanted out of us was totally the opposite of what we were. We were into the DJing thing, the party thing."

"A hit record is a hit record," Melle Mel says. "Whether you have a problem with Sylvia and Sugar Hill Records or not, anybody who has a problem with 'The Message' is an idiot, because that's the biggest record that you ever had. If you're gonna be mad at her, be mad at her for something else but you damn sure can't be mad at her for that."

"The Message" has been sampled on hits by Puff Daddy and Ice Cube, while its lyrical legacy is incalculable. By revealing a public appetite for sociopolitical lyrics, it pioneered material that is now fundamental to hip-hop. "It was a heartfelt experience for people to hear that record," Melle Mel says. "Am I proud of it? It's one of the greatest records ever. You've gotta be proud of it." *DORIAN LYNSKEY*

Clockwise from top: Ebet Roberts; Janette Beckman/Retna Ltd.; Mr. Snuggles

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Ask_Blender

SOLVING YOUR POP CONUNDRUMS SINCE 2001

From top: Micky Dolenz; Jimi Hendrix

Is it true Micky Dolenz of the Monkees helped break Jimi Hendrix in the U.S.?

BUZZ HALLIDAY, MANCHESTER, NH

Well, it's debatable whether their association even *remotely* helped his career — but apart from that, you're right. Monkees Dolenz and Peter Tork met Hendrix at the 1967 Monterey Pop Festival and asked him to support them on their forthcoming dates. Despite the mismatch between the future guitar guru and madcap moptops (Jimi'd even disparaged them to a British paper calling them "dishwater"), he agreed.

Before the dates, Hendrix became friendly with Tork, staying at his Laurel Canyon home, and even borrowing his GTO car and getting it wrecked.

The dates went no better, with Hendrix's tongue-wagging act proving an unappealing appetizer for the pre-teens who shouted "Where's Davy?" over "Foxy Lady." "It was a seriously twisted moment — he lasted seven dates," an embarrassed Nesmith recalled.

I've always loved Coldplay's first hit "Yellow," but what does it mean? Why yellow?

KAREN MASON, AMHERST, MA

Yes, it's kind of confusing, particularly given "the stars" don't "shine yellow," nor do the lyrics refer to anything else of that hue. Rather disappointingly, Chris Martin reckons he simply saw the word "yellow" written down somewhere in Coldplay's studio while searching for a word for a new song about the twinkling sky. Since then, he has variously claimed that "yellow refers to the mood of the band: brightness and hope and devotion" and that "I was not thinking about the color as much as something shining like gold." But he also admitted, "I don't even like the color yellow that much." Well, what can we expect from someone who calls his kid Apple?

Is it true the Perry Ferrell's brainchild, Lollapalooza, was actually stolen from Ian Astbury of the Cult and the Doors?

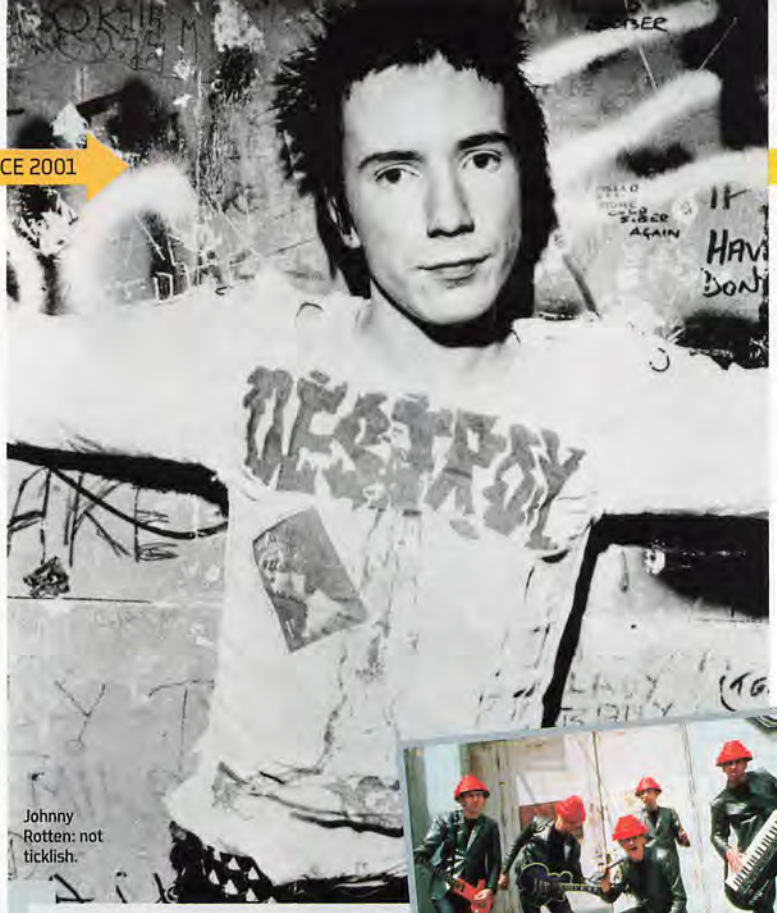
CHAD WELCH, VIA E-MAIL

Yes, Farrell's big idea wasn't all his own. The concept for a cross-genre alt-festival was the brainchild of current Doors frontman Ian Astbury. In 1990, he put together a diverse bill, including Ice-T, Queen Latifah, Soundgarden, Iggy Pop, the Indigo Girls, the Cramps and the Charlatans, to raise money for Native-American-related causes. The Cult leader was inspired by a chance meeting while on a 1989 tour with Metallica in North Dakota. After watching a Native American man fix his truck, he was invited to his house for dinner. During an animated conversation, he found his new friend was about to study resource management at college to help purify his tribe's drinking water. "Then he asked me what I was doing for my community," Astbury recalled. "I could only answer 'Fuck all' and that came as a bad shock to me. . . . I began to plan the Gathering of the Tribes, which was definitely the inspiration for Lollapalooza."

The California shows took place on October 6th at the Shoreline Amphitheatre near San Francisco and the following day at the Pacific Amphitheatre in Costa Mesa. The event was influential but problematic: Astbury believes he lost $50,000 of his own money, and many found the performances lackluster.

Relations between the acts were also strained. At one point, Ice-T paraded ostentatiously around the aisles, distracting the crowd from a set by feminist folkies the Indigo Girls. Singer Amy Ray responded angrily, telling the audience, "The purpose to be here is . . . not to cause a scene."

Ice-T claimed he hadn't intended to cause any disrespect, and this unlikely beef never went any further. [BLENDER]



Johnny Rotten: not ticklish.

My friend claims Johnny Rotten wanted to join Devo after leaving the Sex Pistols. Can you confirm or deny this?

NOAH LEVY, NEW YORK, NY

Even we can hardly believe this one, but Devo founder Mark Mothersbaugh swears it's true. After leaving the Pistols in 1978, reggae fan John Lydon (formerly Johnny Rotten) went to Jamaica with the famed English entrepreneur-adventurer and label boss Richard Branson looking to get some much-needed "me time."

While there, Branson reportedly flew down Mothersbaugh, and Bob Casale stuffed them with the island's quality grass, revealing: "We have Johnny Rotten in the next room, and he wants to be the new lead singer for Devo. If you guys are ready to announce it, we have the press from England here, and they're ready to take photos and do articles."

The idea of backing Lydon sent the pair into stoned hysterics and the idea was killed before they even met him. To this day, they don't know how serious it was. So, sadly, we'll never know how well Lydon could have whipped it.

Devo: "Who you callin' potheads?"

YOUR QUESTIONS

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Please include your first and last name, your hometown and your state or province. Cool!

Clockwise, from left: Govert De Roos/LFI; Bettmann/Corbis; Bettmann/Corbis; ELE/REX/USA

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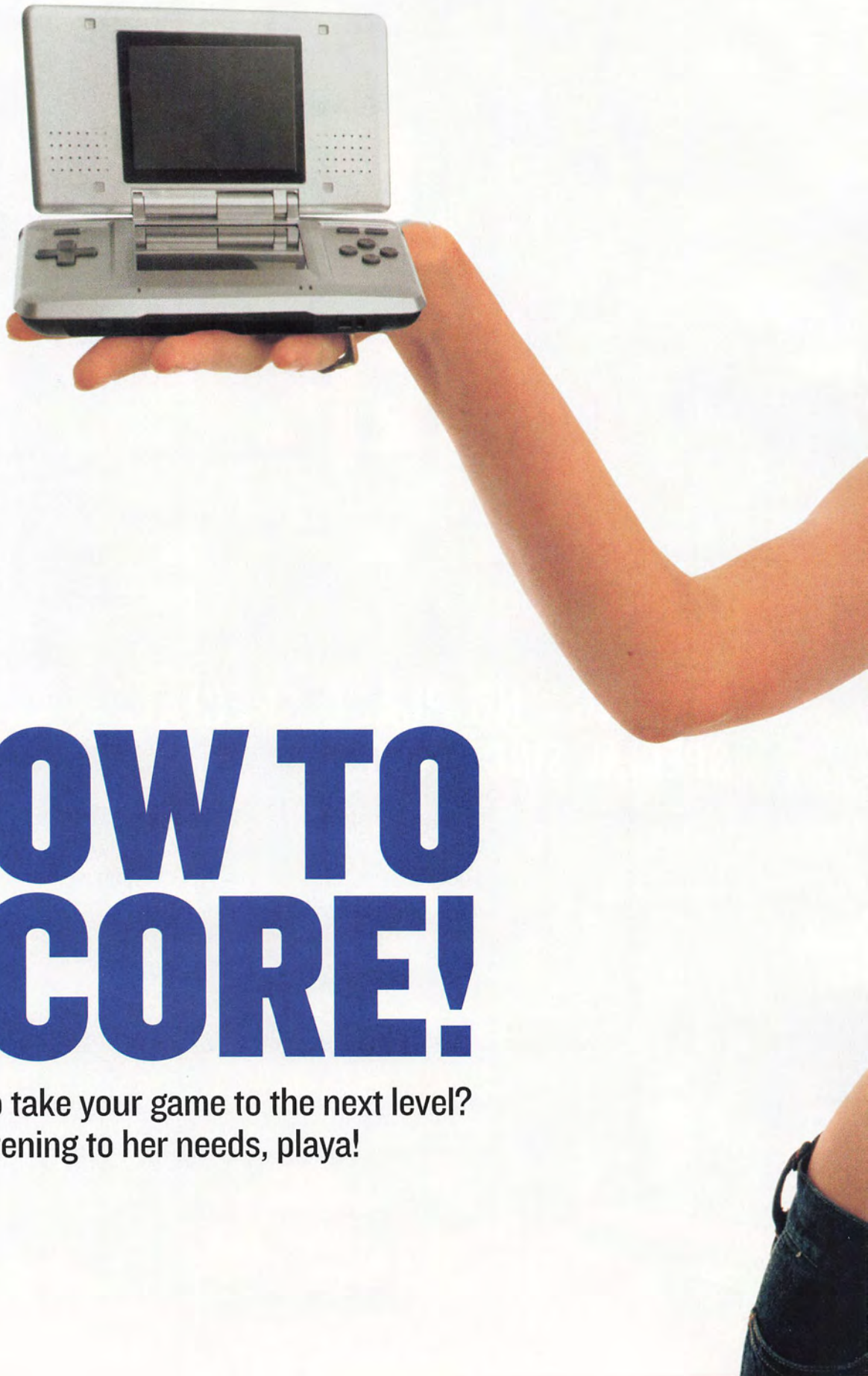

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THE GREAT AMERICAN ROCK-OFF!

Faced with the most important presidential election of our lifetime, *Blender* did what any concerned citizen would: commissioned two weird-ass protest songs! God bless the Flaming Lips' **Wayne Coyne,** God bless **Ted Nugent,** and God bless America!

BY ADRIAN DEEVOY ★ PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS McPHERSON

Props by Gregorio Racadio

"YOU JUST NEED THREE CHORDS AND A BIG SLOGAN."
WAYNE COYNE

Deevoy and Coyne: "Look, *nothing* rhymes with 'orange,' OK?"

ON THE SAME afternoon that President George W. Bush courts the Cuban vote at the Miami Arena, Flaming Lips singer Wayne Coyne is sitting on the city's famous South Beach, contemplating a roll of toilet paper bearing multiple images of the President's face.

"A protest song has got to be simple," the bearded 44-year-old Coyne says. "You want people to sing along to the thing at a rally or whatever, so you don't want anything too complex or too clever."

The man beside him, dressed in a furry elephant suit, grunts in agreement. Or perhaps, as it is 92 degrees today, he is merely grunting in discomfort. The fellow in the oversized donkey outfit, meanwhile, says nothing.

Seemingly oblivious to the surreal turn the day is taking, Coyne continues his slightly derailed train of thought.

"I'm not sure that we can write a song that's going to bring down the government," he muses. "And I'm not sure I *want* to do that entirely. But if we can write something that makes people laugh or cry or think for a moment, then we'll have achieved our goal. So really, we're protesting against people *not* laughing or crying or thinking."

"Exactly," says the guy nearby in the rubber Dubya mask.

Wayne Coyne is in Miami for the MTV Video Music Awards, where he will roll over the audience in a large plastic bubble before presenting an award to OutKast. Whether this is a poetic statement on the isolation that fame brings or just a daft prank is unclear. "But, hey, I'll go with the 'poetic' explanation," Coyne says. "Sounds good."

During his short stay in the Sunshine State, he has also agreed to write a protest song with *Blender*. The song will address issues both personal and political in unsettlingly simple language. The tune will be instantaneous, universal and unforgettable. That's the theory, anyhow.

We have guitars — Coyne is particularly taken with the beaten-up, 1967 Gibson acoustic he is handed ("It's a proper protest guitar!" he says) — we have paper, we have pens, we have . . . no clue as to what we want to protest.

So, as is the way with most songwriting collaborations, we spend several hours talking about anything but the song we are about to compose. And Wayne Coyne can do "random" better than most. Hence, we discuss at great length the mating habits of scallops, reversing the aging process, how museums make you tired, and the psychology of the skimpy summer dress, all the while taking great care not to mention anything vaguely protestable.

Strolling across South Beach's bleached sand, Coyne strums his guitar and sings the Beatles' "Give Peace a Chance." The sight of a wandering minstrel in a striped Dolce & Gabbana suit amuses the sunbathers and raises a chuckle in the lifeguard hut.

"I would love to have my picture taken with a big group of naked women," Coyne announces — but there are very few takers, save for a leathery old gent wearing a distressingly small "banana hammock."

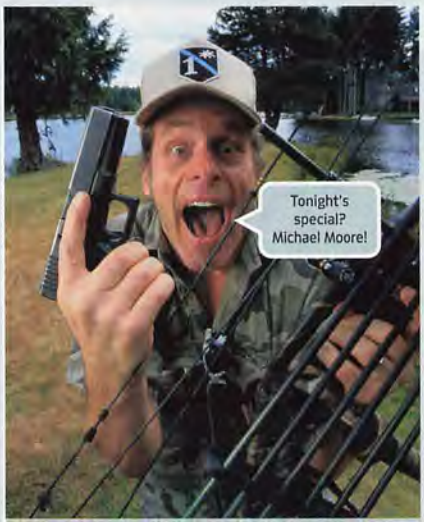
"You just need three chords and a big slogan," Coyne explains, finally addressing the topic at hand. "All we need to do is figure out what those chords are and think up a really great slogan."

He fiddles with a few familiar Flaming Lips chord sequences and hums some harmonies to himself. Then he has an idea. "I suggest we have lunch," he says →

"KISS MY ASS, I'M AN AMERICAN!"

RIFFS FROM THE RIGHT!

Gonzo guitar god, one-man slaughterhouse and right-wing firebrand Ted Nugent lets rip on Michael Moore and "welfare brats" in this protest tune written especially for *Blender*!



"Chords do the song a grave disservice," Ted Nugent explains of "Stand," the song he penned for *Blender*. "There are no chords in written form to represent my snarling firepiss! But in a pinch for pedestrians: Chorus: A–C–D variations and half tones; Verse: D–C and half tones; Bridge: B–A and half tones." Thanks, Nuge!

"STAND" BY TED NUGENT

VERSE 1
I don't need John Kerry to wipe my ass
Don't need Ted Kennedy to spill my glass
Al Not-So-Sharpton is a horse's ass
Redistribution is a fuckin' laugh

CHORUS
I don't need nobody to hold my hand
Don't need nobody, I can stand
Make it on my own in a rock & roll band
Kiss my fuckin' ass, I'm an American

VERSE 2
Ya say you're friends with Michael Moore
Then you are friends with pimps and whores
The Second Amendment ain't about no sport
No right to self-defense in a Kerry court

CHORUS

BRIDGE
You don't think I'm taxed enuff?
Well I'm ready to call your bluff
Pimps and whores and welfare brats
Too much government getting fat

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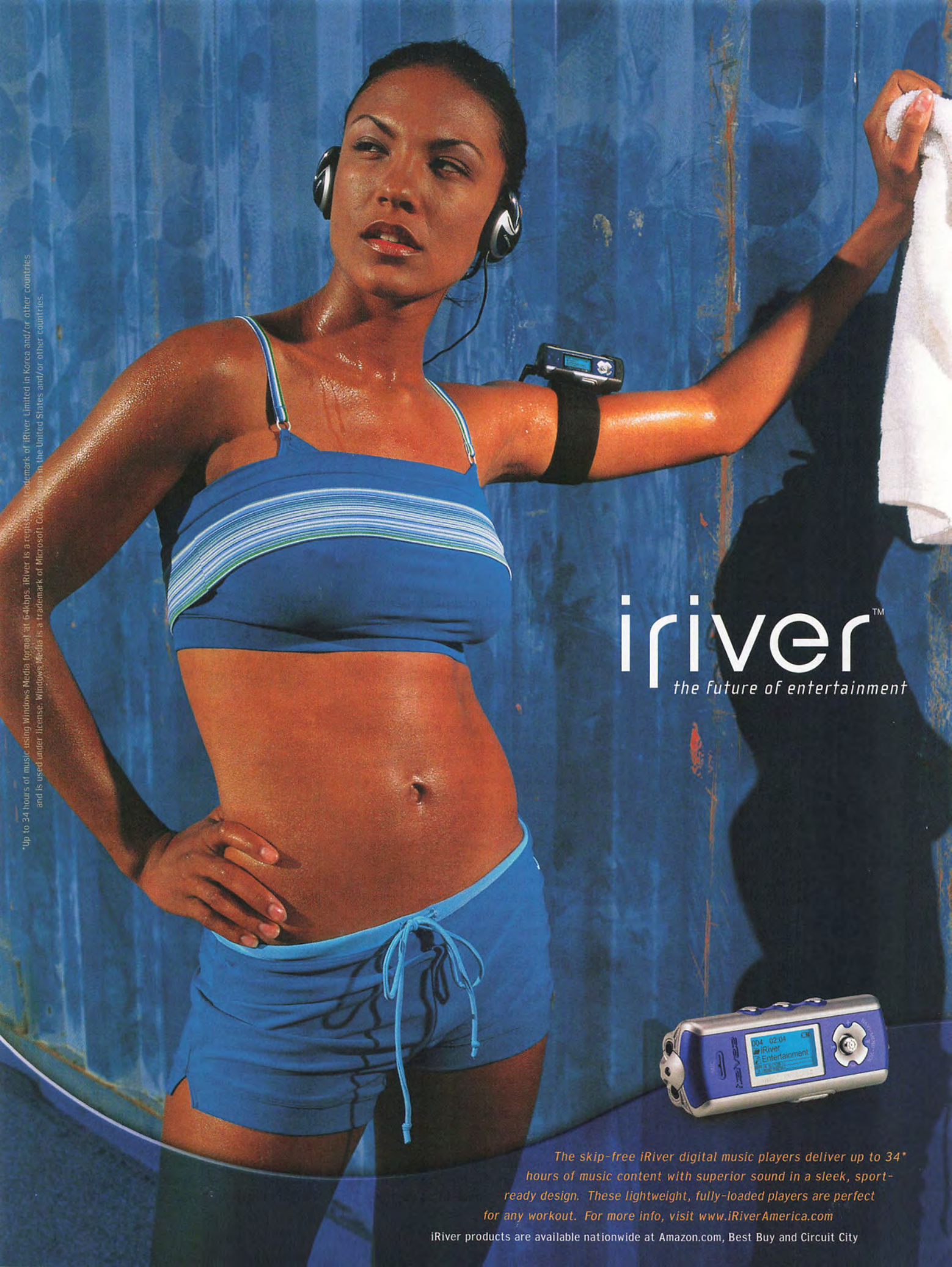
Go to www.tednugent.com or www.blender.com to hear "Stand"!

"THERE ARE NO CHORDS TO REPRESENT MY SNARLING FIREPISS."
TED NUGENT

From top: Chris McPherson; Dan Lamont/Corbis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LICKS FROM THE LEFT!

"WE'RE MOVIN' INTO THE WHITE HOUSE!"

Forget Jagger and Richards. Move over, Lennon and McCartney. In this *Blender* original, Flaming Lips wiseman Wayne Coyne teams with our own Adrian Deevoy to gently persuade the electorate to lick Bush in November.

"THE WHITE HOUSE (IS SUCH A NICE HOUSE!!)"

BY WAYNE COYNE & ADRIAN DEEVOY

VERSE 1

Hope you remember, come this November
The world as it's spinning
When your guy is winning
But if ya come up losing
It's just a matter of choo-oo-sin'
But this world won't change for you and me

VERSE 2

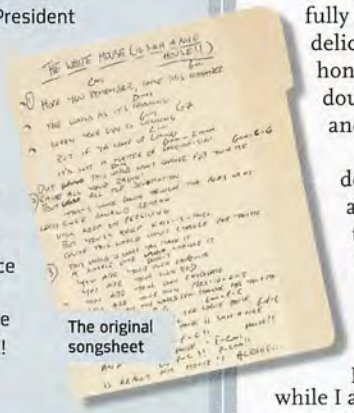
'Cause all of your ragin'
'Bout all the devastation
That's come down through the ages
Or at least since Ronald Reagan
Will keep on persisting
But you'll keep existing
'Cause this world won't change
for you and me

VERSE 3

This world is what you make it
A simple vote don't change it
You are your own governor
You are your own god
You are your own candidate
You are your own President
That way the
world can
change for you
and me

MIDDLE 8

We're movin' into
the White House
'Cause this White
House is such a nice
house!!
And this nice house
Is really my house!!
All right. . . .



The original songsheet

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"I said, 'You've got a lot of wax in your ear!' "

brightly. "We need to think about this whole thing some more."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

AS COYNE WAITS for our food to arrive, he gets down to the serious business of bitching about other musicians. He is refreshingly forthright in his opinions: A Canadian songstress is dismissed as a "total fucking retard"; the singer with one of the world's most successful bands is a "very unpleasant person despite his image"; and an internationally loved male solo act is "actually a jerk."

He is amused that Ted Nugent will be contributing a song to this article. "Will it be about murdering moose?" he says, fully aware that as we tuck into our delicately arranged salads and honeyed iced-tea, the Nuge will doubtless be devouring ox innards and quaffing warm otter blood.

Coyne orders dessert, further deferring his task. He says he's aware that if *Blender* is asking him to write a protest song, it's probably a given it will be anti-Bush.

"But that's too obvious," says a man who has spent his 21-year, 10-album career avoiding the predictable. "I have to say that while I am against Bush, my life has been pretty good since he's been in office."

It's true. Bush's first term has coincided with a significant upturn in the Flaming Lips' fortunes. In 2002, they

"I'M AN OLD GUY. I DON'T THINK IN BLACK AND WHITE TERMS ANYMORE." WAYNE COYNE

released one of this millenium's most critically garlanded and publicly adored albums, *Yoshimi Battles the Pink Robots*. The Flaming Lips' live show, previously written off as some sort of bloody, indie *Rocky Horror Show*, became a hot ticket. Coyne was acclaimed as a songwriter and fêted as a performer. Suddenly, everyone, including Justin Timberlake and Nicole Kidman, just *loves* the Lips.

"Now is this all fortunate timing?" Coyne inquires. "Or does it have something to do with the American public's thinking, which is in some way attributable to the people running the country?"

With this in mind, he decides a straightforward anti-government song might be a little cheap.

"Look, I'm 44," Coyne says. "I'm an old guy. I don't think in the same black-and-white terms I did when I was 16. You still might be angry about shit, but you learn to present your argument more persuasively."

This is our cue to get going. "Come on, guys," Coyne says, snapping to and shunting aside his ice-cream. "We can't sit around eating fancy food all day in a beautiful hotel by a beautiful pool full of ➔

From top: Chris McPherson; Alphonse Telymonde (still life)

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beautiful women. We've got a goddamn protest song to write."

In fairness, Coyne has given the matter much thought. As we settle with our guitars in the hotel corridor — don't ask — he begins rummaging through his suit pockets for pieces of paper.

"I wrote down a couple of words," he mumbles. "I wanted to rhyme the word 'cerebral' with 'be real.' Do you think we can do that? And it'd be good to get the word 'November' in there. Maybe we can put that with 'remember.' "

It has often been said that co-writing a song is similar to making love. There is a long period of sniffing around, waiting for the right moment, then you don't know what to stick in and whether your partner is going to like it if you do.

Keith Richards has always complained Mick Jagger wants to make their songs quicker than Richards believes they should be. It's a terrible thought, but you instinctively know which one you'd rather shag.

Then there is the vacant stare. Study any photos of John Lennon and Paul McCartney in mid-composition and they will be holding the other's gaze but with absolutely no expression in their eyes. This may allow for the free flow of creative electricity, but it makes you look incredibly clueless.

The Coyne/*Blender* partnership proves no exception to this rule. And as Coyne has eyes the color of Coca-Cola it makes the experience even more mystifying. Staring aside, a song begins to take shape.

Coyne begins by modifying an old Woody Guthrie tune for the verses. "It's what Woody did himself," he says. "Take a traditional song, change the tune and make it your own. He'd be proud of us."

In 2003, Cat Stevens, by then fundamentalist Muslim Yusuf Islam, wasn't quite so proud when his publishers noticed Coyne had borrowed the top-line melody of his hit "Father and Son" and used it in the Lips' "Fight Test."

Coyne acknowledged the songs' similarities, adding that he wasn't familiar with the Stevens original. The royalties from "Fight Test" are now divided between the two parties. Yet Coyne remains undeterred.

"No one really *owns* music," he says, smiling innocently. "It's like saying you can't use the color purple because someone owns blue and someone else has all the rights to red. Music is out there for everybody."

In the spirit of musical sharing, we steal the chords for our middle 8 from a big '70s heartland ballad, then customize the melody so that the theft will be essentially undetectable. As every songwriter from Bob Dylan to the Matrix will tell you: You can't copyright chords.

Blender once had a dream *just* like this!

"WOODY GUTHRIE WOULD BE PROUD OF US." WAYNE COYNE

Coyne's getting into it now, and silently writes a flurry of lyrics, which amount to two whole verses and a pay-off line that can double as a chorus.

"And the world won't change for you and me," he sings. *Blender* suggests a couple of changes to the lyrics and Coyne looks delighted. "I like that," he declares. "Yes! You can have that."

The song, it transpires, is about making personal choices and resisting governmental mind control. It is called "The White House (Is Such a Nice House!!)." The two exclamation points are included as an homage to the pair of question marks that complete the Flaming Lips' own "Do You Realize??"

We record a rough demo in the bathroom. "Get a Johnny Cash vibe going on the guitar," Coyne says. "I'll do a spoken-word intro." And he does, for two minutes, before the full majesty of the song unfolds.

With the recording complete, Coyne looks at the lyrics one last time. "Well, that's another bunch of existential bullshit," he says with no small pride. "I think that went pretty well." [BLENDER]

Chris McPherson (2)

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Praying! "Shmearing"! Peeping! All that and more was on the agenda when **Vanessa Carlton** accepted *Blender*'s $848 challenge.

BY CLARK COLLIS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS McPHERSON

"I LOVE STRIPPERS!"

AS *BLENDER* STANDS outside Vanessa Carlton's front door in a San Francisco alley, we can't help but feel a little nervous. Sure, the piano-playing songbird is a big star who scored a breakthrough hit with her 2002 single "A Thousand Miles," but that's not the reason. Nor is it the fact that she has suggested she spend her $848 of *Blender*-provided money "chumming," an activity in which animal blood and guts are thrown into the ocean to attract sharks.

No, the reason for *Blender*'s nervousness is the fact that Carlton is hurtling toward us at an alarming pace on the back of a Ducati driven by her boyfriend, producer Stephan "Third Eye Blind" Jenkins.

"It's really fucking ugly," Jenkins remarks of the bike, after braking too close to *Blender* for our liking. "But it's almost so ugly it's beautiful."

Carlton, meanwhile, has bad news on the chumming front.

"We've just been down to the water and it's too windy to go out," the 24 year old explains. "It's probably for the good. If I had seen a shark, I'd have shit myself."

Instead, after bidding Jenkins adieu, she suggests spending the money in her Union Square neighborhood, promising "surprises" along the way. And surprises there will be, as well as drinking, probable illegalities and, well, no small amount of fresh semen.

But our first stop could not be more refined as Carlton drops into an antique-map shop around the corner. While the singer peruses their vintage wares, *Blender* chats with the store's owner, James Schein, a friend of Carlton's and a former roadie for the notoriously cantankerous jazz legend Miles Davis.

"Actually, he was very nice," Schein says. "Of course, he didn't talk to me for two years. And, then, the first thing he said was, 'Get the fuck out of my way.' But apart from that. . . ."

After some *um*-ing and *ah*-ing, Carlton buys a 19th-century map of the Middle East before announcing that she has decided to spend much of the rest of her money "bribing people to vote" in the Presidential election. The singer is an ardent supporter of the bipartisan get-off-your-ass-and-get-to-the-ballot-box Rock the Vote. So we head down to Washington Square Park, where an all-business Carlton bustles up to strangers and, if they show any ambivalence about voting, hands them between $40 and $60 to change their mind. Most people are easy to convince. Seemingly *too* easy, we decide.

"WE'VE DONE POLITICS. NOW LET'S DO SEX!"

"You have to promise me that you will actually vote," she pleads with one man before handing over the dough.

"No problem," he replies. "But who *are* you?"

Despite her success, she says, she's rarely recognized and, to prove her point, suggests we relocate to the famed Caffe Trieste. Over the years, it has become a legendary haunt for artists such as Jack Kerouac and Francis Ford Coppola, who wrote the script for *The Godfather* here.

"You get a lot of socialists here, too," she says. "Which is always refreshing."

The daughter of hippie parents, Carlton is very much to the left of the political spectrum and, while she's happy people vote at all, confesses she would much rather they do so for Kerry than Bush.

"Basically, in Iraq, we've been led down a path for reasons custom-made to fit an administration's own motivation and ideology," she argues. "Also, I do prefer my President to know how to speak in complete sentences."

It was at the Trieste where Carlton wrote half of her second album, *Harmonium*, unmolested, she says, by the public. And, at times, sobriety.

"A glass of red wine," she says of her inspiration. "That's the trick every time."

The album, which she describes as being "less narcissistic" than her debut,

SPEND OUR CASH!

THE STAR
Vanessa Carlton

THE MISSION
To spend $848 in one day any way she wants

THE REASON
Blender asked her to!

2002's *Be Not Nobody*, was produced by boyfriend Jenkins. *Blender* suggests that sounds like a recipe for disaster.

"People tried to ward me off having my boyfriend produce it," she says. "I've never been one to take the easy path. But we got through it."

It's easy to imagine Carlton gets her way most of the time. While her image may be of the frail songbird, she seems as self-possessed discussing politics as choosing to spend her money at a peep show.

Wait, you want to do *what* now?

"Come on," Carlton says. "We've done politics. Now let's do sex!"

Five minutes later, we are standing outside the Lusty Lady peep show, another SF cultural landmark, Carlton explains, albeit one offering hot naked women rather than warm beverages. Wandering inside, Carlton and *Blender* find a booth that doesn't have a scrunched-up tissue on the floor and feed a dollar into the machine. A screen slides up and we are faced with the sight of three near-naked gyrating women, one of whom turns her back to us, offering up the kind of view usually enjoyed only by registered proctologists. Even more off-putting is that — because the room the women are dancing in is mirrored — we can see the faces of other voyeurs, some of whom are markedly more "excited" than Carlton.

"That was disappointing," she says. "The dancers looked bored. And the room was really musty. I felt too close to other people's . . . bodily fluids."

When *Blender* asks about her previous strip-club experience, she reveals, "I've had a lap dance. It was for my 21st birthday. I was in New York — it was so fun. We started talking and became friends. Women love to strip for other women. It's so much more comfortable. Not that I do it all the time. Damn, I know that's going to be the headline: I love strippers!"

In need of spiritual cleansing after her sexual foray, Carlton decides to hit a nearby Catholic church, offer a donation and, despite being Jewish, confess her sins. Her plan is thwarted, however, when we discover an actual service is going on inside.

"I hope these people realize Jesus was just an uppity Jew," whispers the singer, prompting *Blender* to lead the way out before we are struck by lightning.

Finally, after Carlton splurges on a Ching-dynasty hair pin, we retreat to her local bar, where she mulls over her day of ass-peeping.

"It is amazing that you can pay a buck and see that," an incredulous Carlton says. "But that's America! If you have money, you can almost do whatever the hell you want!" [BLENDER]

GROWING PAINS

The Madden twins' harsh childhood helped make **Good Charlotte** punk megastars. But can they keep their cred in a world of girlie fans and concept CDs?

BY MICHAEL ODELL ★ PHOTOGRAPHY BY LEGO

"There are people here who really, really hate us," Good Charlotte's Joel Madden says, looking around warily. "But we've done the Warped Tour every year since 2001. It's like family. We're not leaving the tour just 'cause we sold some records."

The band sit backstage at the Germain Amphitheater in Columbus, Ohio. Around us it's a spiky-haired, raised-middle-finger punk jamboree: mohawks, combat boots and a wince-fest of adventurous piercings and tattoos. As we try to talk, words are drowned out by performances on six stages at what amounts to a Rage Olympics. There is snarling and shouting, roaring and recriminatory yelling. And then there is Good Charlotte.

Welcome to the Vans Warped Tour, an annual punk throw-down for misfits and the alienated. But the Waldorf, Maryland, quintet are the real outsiders here: three million copies sold of their second album, *The Young and the Hopeless*, makes them by far the most commercial proposition. And there's their penchant for a tune. Not to mention their young female fan base, which casts them as unlikely (and in some cases unwelcome) Warped guests.

"I used to care, but I don't now," guitarist and identical twin of Joel, Benji Madden, says. "Punk is a state of mind. That I can believe. But to make it a strict musical code is just lame."

Even so, it would be nice to receive the occasional high five from someone in, say, Guttermouth.

"We get a lot of very young girls coming up and asking what our favorite →

Good Charlotte, from left Chris Wilson, Benji Madden, Joel Madden, Paul Thomas and Billy Martin

MADE
VOTE OR DIE
LEVEL 27

color is, which is cool," guitarist Billy Martin says. "I love them, and they make us what we are. But just once I'd like a guy to come up and ask how I play a riff or say, 'You guys are cool.' "

Before Good Charlotte take the stage, *Blender* catches the Casualties, who embody punk's "keepin' it real" ethos: outsized mohawks, loud guitars, neck tendons all purply and stretched from shouting.

"We were working in fucking Subway and then lost our fucking jobs, so we formed this fucking band," they say. Half an hour of hoarse bellowing and pogo-ing later, their singer gets to what really irks him: "All these bands who say they're fucking punks — they ain't no punks!"

The Warped Tour: "Electrify the fence . . . now!"

Good Charlotte — the Maddens, guitarist Martin, bassist Paul Thomas and drummer Chris Wilson — hit the main stage minutes later to what is easily the biggest crowd of the day. There is no moshpit as such, rather good-natured fist pumping, unison singing and quite a lot of parents chaperoning boys and girls on their rock & roll initiation. The kids scream with delight, the parents nod approvingly, and the dyed-in-the-wool punkers, many too young to drive, stand on the sidelines sneering.

Then comes Lars Frederiksen and the Bastards. Good Charlotte are barely offstage when Frederiksen strides to the mic looking like he's just eaten a live animal for lunch and bellows, "OK, who's ready for some *real* punk fucking rock!"

"That's cool," Benji says afterward with a shrug. "You can't be everyone's definition of punk."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

GOOD CHARLOTTE'S THIRD album, *The Chronicles of Life and Death*, stretches the definition of punk further than ever. As with Blink-182 and Green Day, there has been rapid decline in the teen petulance and frat-house, booger-flicking tendencies of pop-punk. Instead, artists have embraced lush orchestral arrangements, tinkly piano and lyrical soul-baring, which bears the unmistakable mark of emo.

> **"NO ONE CAN SAY WE HAVEN'T GROWN AND MOVED ON."**
> BENJI MADDEN

"Some bands wait until their 30s to do this," Benji says with a smile. "I think we've matured quite quickly. Joel and I are only 25, but we've been making music 10 years already. No one can say we haven't grown and moved on."

Joel adds, "The first two albums, we let people tell us who were. If people said, 'You're pop-punk,' then we kinda believed them. This is the first album where we've torn up the script and done what we feel."

The Chronicles still has the bratty griping of the lead single "Predictable," which recalls the sulky melodiousness of 2003's "Girls and Boys." And there's more than enough to keep the doomsayers happy with "The World Is Black" and the CD's title track, which tells the story of a newborn "choking on someone's insides."

But make no mistake: *The Chronicles* is a concept album spanning the outer reaches of their topsy-turvy philosophical world. Sold as CDs marked *Life* and *Death* (alike, save for different bonus tracks) it is by turns optimistic and wrist-slashingly miserable. By the end, you feel you've heard from someone who can't get right their dose of mood-altering medication. →

HOW TO LOOK LIKE GOOD CHARLOTTE!

DWEEB MAKEOVER!

It took a team of highly trained stylists and an entire afternoon to turn *Blender*'s straight-laced senior designer, Martin Hoops, into the spitting image of street-style icons Joel and Benji. And they say punk is dead. . . .

BEFORE
MARTIN SAYS: "My style? Fratboy meets Urkel."

1 THE HAIR
HAIR PRO KARLO ORTIZ SAYS: "We dyed his hair black and gave it an asymmetrical section on the side. Then we made the leopard look."
MARTIN SAYS: "I like the shape of it. It's . . . dramatic."

2 MAKEUP
MAKEUP PRO ALLY KENNY SAYS: "We made it smudgy and smoky, then we did a softer line down the face. We wanted him to look like a good-looking junkie."
MARTIN SAYS: "Now I feel like I'm transforming!"

3 THE CLOTHES
STYLIST DIE J MARS SAYS: "It has to be black. It's gothic with the bondage straps on the pants."
MARTIN SAYS: "My inner goth finally has a face."

4 THE TATTOOS
ALLY KENNY SAYS: "When the claws are out on the panther, it's like some wild girl that wants to go at his neck."
MARTIN SAYS: "I'll get one of my groupies to rub it off later. Wait, I don't have any groupies."

AFTER
MARTIN SAYS: "My mother's gonna kill me!" *LAUREN HARRIS*

From top: John Shearer/Wirelmage.com; Tim Soter (6)

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The pretty beach harmonies of "We Believe" would have Lars Frederiksen slicing off his own ears in disgust. *Blender* listens to the track's ethereal chorus on Joel's iPod in a backstage enclosure thick with punks. There is a strong sense that hearing the line "There is a love that could fall down like rain!" is something we might pay for with our lives.

"We can be a very cynical band," Joel says. "But over this last year, I think we've come to terms with a lot of the stuff that made us take such a bleak view. Some people may be shocked how much love there is on this record."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The identical Madden twins are from a third-generation Irish-American family. Their mother is a fervent Christian. Their father worked as a butcher and a house painter to support the four Madden children.

But he was also an alcoholic with a combustible nature. When they were 16, their father left the family home for good. Their older brother, Josh, also left. Joel and Benji were effectively in charge as the family slid into debt and homelessness. Benji, five minutes older than his brother, assumed the father-figure role.

"That five minutes' age difference is important," Joel says. "He was definitely my protector, and he still is. But I don't think he ever lets' on just how sensitive he is."

←"No, dude. Bowties are *really* punk." Senior portraits of Benji (*top*) and Joel.

It was these events that gave the band their quirky, upbeat fatalism. But the new maturity is characterized by "Walk Away (Maybe)," on which the young punks decide to face their pain head-on.

"I ended a serious, long-term relationship eight months ago," Joel says. "I realized I have abandonment issues and I could never let her in. I went into therapy, and that's helped. I have worked on my temper. I have worked on being mistrustful. More importantly, I have just accepted myself and stopped apologizing for who I am and who we are as a band."

Recent rumors that Joel's emotional rehabilitation has included dates with 17-year-old pop princess Hilary Duff are roundly rejected.

"No, I'm not dating her. We're friends. She's a great girl and I like her a lot. But no, we're not dating. I get the impression she's not too interested in punk," Joel says with a wry smile.

But if there is an optimism and purposefulness to *The Chronicles*, it arises from a more fundamental emotional breakthrough. "Walk Away (Maybe)" and "We Believe" could not have been written if the twins had not addressed the possibility of forgiving their father.

"What happened when we were 16 kind of froze me in time," Joel says. "I was always reacting to that, and making sure I'd never go through that pain again. But I'm an adult now. I understand dad was a hard-working guy who wasn't perfect. He did some things that were wrong. But we're all human, and we do the best with what we're given. I'd probably have been the same if I'd been working two jobs my whole life to feed four kids. My dad made mistakes. Maybe one day we'll get to talk about it."

Benji is similarly forgiving. After years working low-wage jobs to keep his family and Good Charlotte together, he says he knows what his father's responsibilities were like.

Before Benji gave up drinking alcohol altogether, he even began to believe he shared some of his father's traits.

"I think I am predisposed to a lot of stuff," he says. "One of my ambitions in life is to have a successful relationship. I don't know anyone who knows the secret to that, but I know for sure that the tools handed down from my grandparents to my parents to me aren't the right ones."

> **"I HAVE ABANDONMENT ISSUES. THERAPY HAS HELPED."**
> JOEL MADDEN

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The Warped Tour leaves Ohio the following day and rolls northeast toward the Darien Lakes Performing Arts Center, a rural and very un-punk venue near Buffalo, New York. Punk democracy dictates that Warped acts' set times change every day and that no artists are guaranteed special billing. Good Charlotte arrive mid-morning and land a sought-after 8 P.M. billing.

With a full afternoon to kill, Benji invites *Blender* onto the tour bus. He chirps "hi," but his body language undermines the welcome: He curls up in the farthest corner of the sofa with legs under knees and covers himself with a blanket. A duplicate of his younger brother but with added carbs, it takes a while to engage with him as a person, since first and foremost he is a human mural.

Your eyes are drawn first to the four pieces of metal hanging out of his mouth. Then you notice the Last Supper tattooed up his left arm and the legend "Made Man" across the knuckles, a tattoo to mark the band signing their record deal.

But that's nothing compared to the tattoo on his right arm: a gravestone, a funeral in progress and a child crying.

"That's my funeral," Benji says of the tattoo. "And the little girl is my daughter, grieving for me. I can be pretty dark at times, I guess."

He's actually more sensitive and careful than his brother. But wary, too. He doesn't know if they will ever go to find their dad. He isn't sure if he will arrive in the afterlife with his tattoos intact.

More pressingly, he doesn't know if the world will accept Good Charlotte's more serious agenda. But he does know that he could not go on the way he was going. And the same is true for his band.

"Before we got out of Waldorf and saw the world," Benji says, "I guess I used to think John Lennon was just some lame old hippy." He pauses, his silver lip studs catching the light. "A lot of punks will hate this, but on a good day, I actually do believe in the power of love." [BLENDER]

Top: Lego

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"I KNOW ALL ABOUT SELF-HUMILIATION"

The Natural Born Killers star turned rock vixen could sing "pretty." But Juliette Lewis would rather perform topless, wear spandex and spank her fans!

BY DAVID KEEPS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY SHERYL NIELDS

Don't take this the wrong way, but onstage you act like a dude, lady.
I am deeply influenced by *serious cock rock*, like David Lee Roth and Iggy Pop. All my life, I've always had . . . whatever you want to call it: that unisexual, asexual thing.

You also love yourself a little spandex. And we do mean little. When you rock out, people can almost see —
My hoo-ha? What are you saying? You're right about the spandex, though; everything has to be skintight, but it has to be movable.

Or removable. You've said you'd like to play shirtless like Iggy. Really?
I totally would. It's less restrictive. The problem is, I don't care to be titillating, excuse the pun. Even on the Vans Warped Tour, wearing a T-shirt dress, I'd have little 14-year-old boys heckling me and making blow job facial expressions! If the pit wasn't so big, I would've gone into the audience and spanked them. And they would have loved it.

A British newspaper said your voice sounds "like a heavy chest infection ripping through a damp Kleenex."
That's hilarious. I do not want to just stand there and sing pretty, which I can do very well. I'm going to give 'em a rock & roll show that's a little bit dangerous and self-humiliating — and I know all about self-humiliation from acting.

Do you ever get a sexual twinge onstage?
Are you kidding? It's bigger than that. There are bigger releases in life than an orgasm.

Do you have groupies?
I think I might, but more from *Natural Born Killers*. They just want me to abuse them. Or maybe they want to dominate me, but they really want the reverse.

What's it like on your band's tour bus?
The funnest. Everybody's sense of humor is off the charts. We watch *Family Guy* — we're obsessed with Stewie. And there's endless sexual humor and shit humor.

What crap song will you admit you like?
Loverboy's "Turn Me Loose." Patty, my drummer, has threatened to leave the band if we cover that!

Have you ever rocked the Loverboy headband?
No, but I'm not above it. Once you wear knee pads and cut-off gloves like I did for the Warped Tour, the headband is only a hop, skip and a jump away!

Who are the sexiest guys in rock?
Jack White, without question, is the new Elvis — un-fucking-believable onstage.

You're single now. What do you look for in a man?
I'm a little older [31], so it's practical things, not just, "Hey, am I sexually drawn to you?" I want to know that they don't do drugs and that they take care of themselves. Once I know that, I like the idea that they can physically protect me.

Why do people get so worked up about you being a Scientologist?
It's sort of a media-perpetuated myth: Scientology and celebrity. But there's a whole world of moms, school teachers, plumbers, who use Scientology to better their lives. My parents are Scientologists and I took it for granted. When I was a youngster, I had insecurity and destructive urges. Then I got involved in Scientology and developed an awareness of myself. It's allowed me to have even more affinity and empathy toward others.

And what have you got against the pharmaceutical industry?
They have to sell the disorder to sell the drugs. If you looked at the symptoms of ADHD [Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder], you'd be shocked. *I* would have it! So I just threw a shout-out in a song to get people to think, like, "Oh, maybe somebody is profiting off your supposed ailment!"

You also rage against "fake tits, mutilation." What's wrong with a little nip-tuck?
There's this weird new female aesthetic of morphing into a plastic fuck-doll. Go to Beverly Hills and you see 50-year-old women with propped-up breasts saying, "Could you give me some full, dick-sucking lips?"

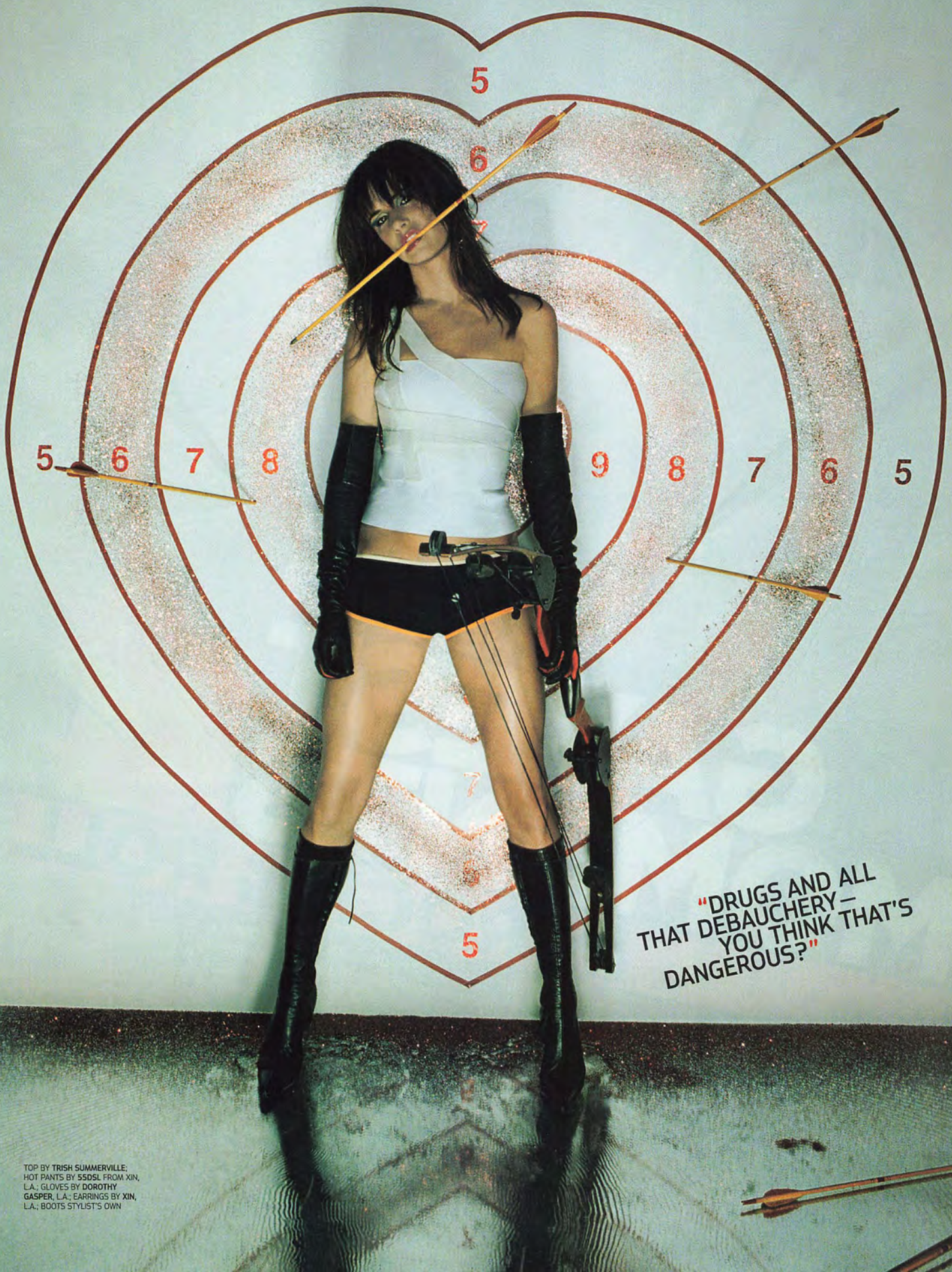
You say you like it straight-edge. What's wrong with a little drugging and drinking?
I just wanted to give a shout-out to that movement. Drugs and all that debauchery — you think that's *dangerous*? It's actually more conformist to do drugs. Purity breeds strength and power, but sometimes people think self-discipline is inhibiting. That's ego-driven bullshit.

So, who's crazier: Courtney Love or Michael Jackson?
Michael might win. I think Courtney is still salvageable. I love that I'm not in this equation.

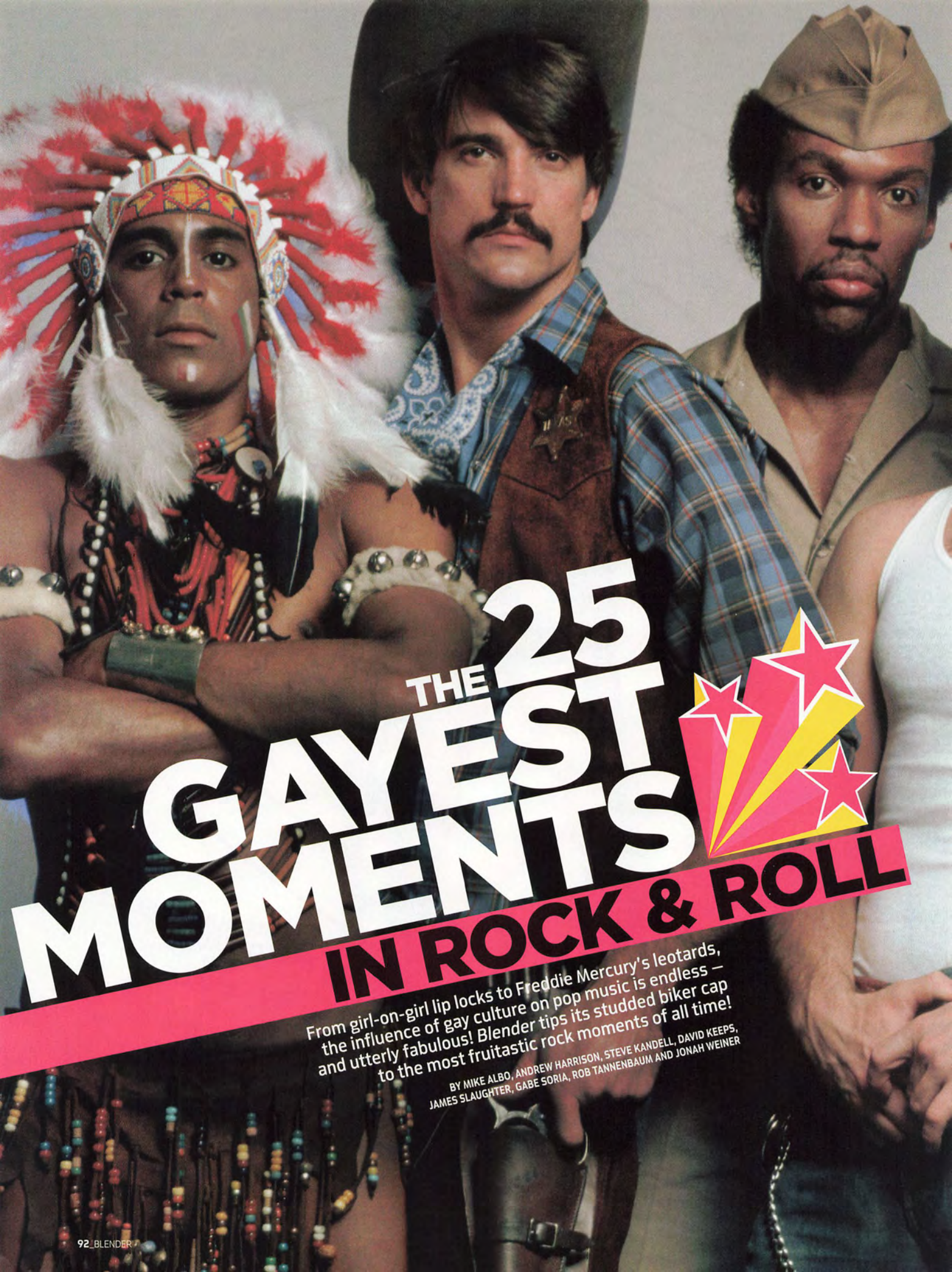
Is Juliette Lewis crazy?
There's a difference between crazy and fun. I'm fun. [BLENDER]

JULIETTE AND THE LICKS' CD, . . . *LIKE A BOLT OF LIGHTNING* (FIDDLER), IS OUT NOW.

Set Design: Jamie Dean for Mercury Artists; styling: Trish Summerville for In Clover; hair: Colleen Conway for Redken at Magnet; makeup: Rachel Goodwin for Stila at Magnet



TOP BY **TRISH SUMMERVILLE**; HOT PANTS BY **55DSL** FROM XIN, L.A.; GLOVES BY **DOROTHY GASPER**, L.A.; EARRINGS BY **XIN**, L.A.; BOOTS STYLIST'S OWN



THE 25 GAYEST MOMENTS IN ROCK & ROLL

From girl-on-girl lip locks to Freddie Mercury's leotards, the influence of gay culture on pop music is endless — and utterly fabulous! Blender tips its studded biker cap to the most fruitastic rock moments of all time!

BY MIKE ALBO, ANDREW HARRISON, STEVE KANDELL, DAVID KEEPS, JAMES SLAUGHTER, GABE SORIA, ROB TANNENBAUM AND JONAH WEINER

THE VILLAGE PEOPLE

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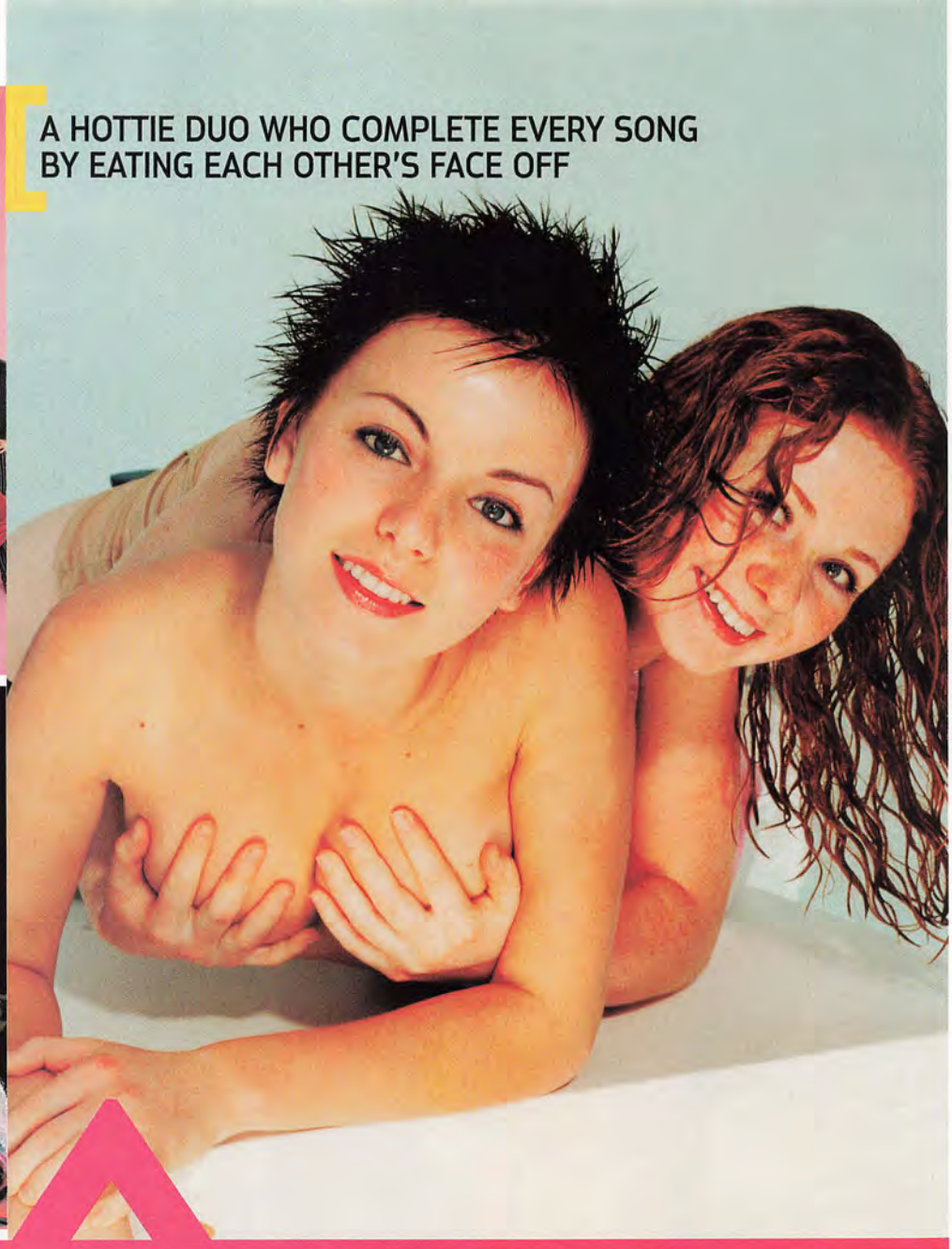
Scissor Sisters: "Maybe we should have called Triple-A."

Ronson and Bowie: "While you're down there . . . ."



A HOTTIE DUO WHO COMPLETE EVERY SONG BY EATING EACH OTHER'S FACE OFF

25

BAD ASS

JOBRIATH TAKES TIMES SQUARE!

In 1973, Elektra Records subtly announced the eponymous debut album by America's first openly gay rock star by unveiling a 42-foot Times Square billboard of the self-styled "true fairy" Jobriath as a naked statue. The album bombed and Elektra canceled a live show featuring Jobriath riding a giant hydraulic penis while dressed as Marlene Dietrich. Jobriath himself maintained until his 1983 AIDS-related death that "the butt on that statue was lousy."

24

GIRL ON GIRL ON GIRL...

t.A.T.u LEADS MASS MAKEOUT SESSION

In 2001, Russian ad exec Ivan Shapovalov noticed an untapped musical niche: underage girls who pretend they're gay and the men who love them! So he created t.A.T.u., a hottie duo who completed every song by eating each other's face off. For the 2003 MTV Movie Awards, Julia Volkova, 17, and Lena Katina, 18, performed "All the Things She Said" with an army of paired-off horny babes who, on cue, played tongue-hockey for the cameras. Cynical, yet titillating!

23

GAY SIDE OF THE MOON

THE SCISSOR SISTERS MAKE GAY CONCEPT ALBUM

Released in July 2004, the Scissor Sisters' jubilant self-titled debut is a *Sgt. Pepper's Homo Arts Club Band* set in the queerest New York. The songs concern gay sex, gay drugs and getting mom drunk so you can tell her you're gay. Jake Shears rhymes "hit of acid" with "your moneymaker's flaccid" and announces: "I left my heart in San Francisco/It's in some mother-fuckin' disco." For those slow on the gay uptake, the sleeve reprises the poster for the Judy Garland movie *The Wizard of Oz*.

22

ZIGGY BLOWS GUITAR!

DAVID BOWIE "FELLATES" MICK RONSON

"Bisexual? Oh Lord, no," David Bowie protested in the late '70s, conveniently forgetting his show in Oxford, on June 17, 1972. Guitarist Mick Ronson was mid-solo when Bowie dropped to his knees, clasped his hands to Ronson's buttocks and began applying lips and tongue to the guitar strings. In a resulting photo, the audience appears to be laughing helplessly. Perhaps they knew that Ronson, born in distinctly un-glam Yorkshire, was Britain's Least Homosexual Man.

Previous page: Lynn Goldsmith/Corbis. This page, clockwise from top left: Joseph Cultice; Jamil GS/Corbis; Mick Rock/Star File

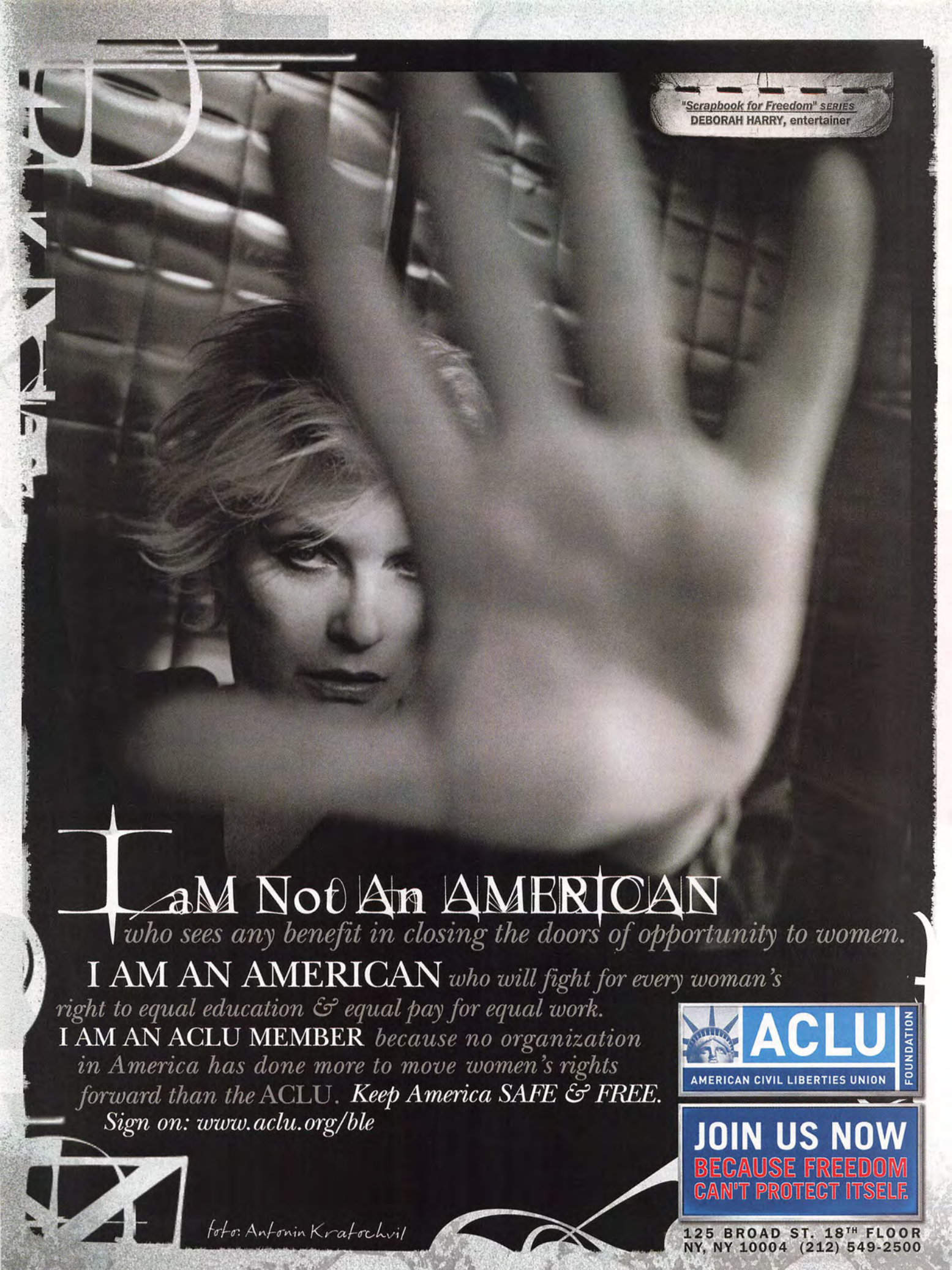

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foto: Antonin Kratochvil

RuPaul: *Not* a natural blonde, woman.

20

HEY LADIES!

INDIGO GIRLS PLAY THE FIRST LILITH FAIR

Call 1997 the Year of the Lesbian: Ellen DeGeneres revealed she wasn't the man-eating sexpot we thought and the openly gay Indigo Girls played their biggest audiences ever. Established by Sarah McLachlan as a mosh-pit-free alternative to Ozzfest, Lilith Fair exposed scads of impressionable lasses to the duo's homespun girl-on-girl action. But mass exposure came with a price: The Indigo Girls were banned from playing at high schools in South Carolina and Tennessee the following year.

19

BLONDES HAVE MORE FUN

THE RUPAUL SHOW PREMIERES ON VH1

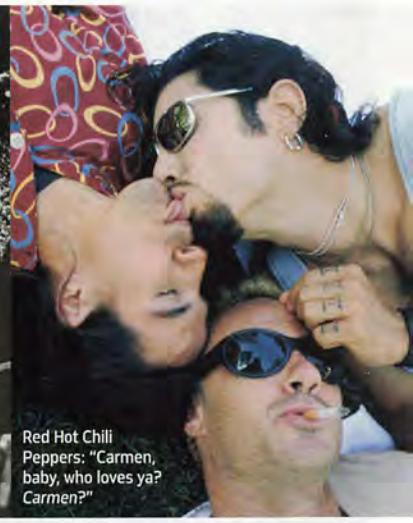
On October 12, 1996, Saturday-night TV took a definitive turn for the queer when everyone's favorite singing drag queen, RuPaul Charles – nearly 7 feet tall in heels – debuted her, er, his weekly late-night talk show with fellow plus-size cross-dresser Dennis Rodman as guest. The ab-fab gabfest remained on the air for over 100 episodes, officially bringing trannies into the mainstream. "If the show makes money," RuPaul said, "they don't care what you're wearing."

21

HELLO, 'FRISCO!

SYLVESTER RECORDS DISCO ANTHEM

L.A. resident Sylvester James moved to the boiling hotbed of gayness, San Francisco, in the late '60s. Joining the cross-dressing cabaret act the Cockettes, he reinvented himself as a towering drag queen. Originally a ballad, 1979's "You Make Me Feel (Mighty Real)" was about the power dancing and/or lust have to put you in touch with your true identity, but in the hands of producer-remixer Patrick Cowley, it became the sweatiest, most affirming hit of the disco era. Sylvester was handed the keys to SF, but bore the brunt of the unrefined "Disco Sucks" backlash. "Decisions like going on *Merv Griffin* in a dress really affected how his music was going to get out there," his publicist Terri Hinte said. AIDS claimed his life in 1988. March 11 is still celebrated as Sylvester Day in San Francisco.



Red Hot Chili Peppers: "Carmen, baby, who loves ya? *Carmen?*"

18

HOOTERS!

THE BACKSTREET BOYS' WET T-SHIRT CONTEST

"Sexiness isn't something that's put on," Backstreet Boy Kevin Richardson once said. "It just naturally comes out of you." So do nipples! In the spring 1997 video for "Quit Playing Games (With My Heart)," a sudden downpour gets shirts flying and man-nips on high alert. With glistening torsos, Kevin, A.J. McLean and Howie D writhed like extras in a *Queer As Folk* disco. Tummy-shy Nick Carter and Brian Littrell kept shirts buttoned, but pulled ecstatic orgasm faces. The single was platinum by September.

17

REALLY FRUITY

LITTLE RICHARD WRITES TWO "TUTTI FRUTTIS"

The song originally went, "Tutti Frutti, good booty/If it don't fit, don't force it/You can grease it, make it easy." But with 15 minutes left in a 1955 recording session, songwriter Dorothy LaBostrie was brought in to sanitize and hetero-fy the lyrics. Though he outed himself as an "old homosexual" in 1979, Little Richard now insists his flamboyance was a ploy. "I had to be Alice or white folks wouldn't let me play their clubs," he said. "Girls fell in love with me anyway."

16

ONE HOT MOMENT

THE RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS' VIDEO SNOG

Looking like sketchy Santa Monica Blvd. hustlers with B.O., the Chili Peppers have always exuded a circle-jerk sexuality. But in 1995, they introduced telegenic eyebrow-plucking Dave Navarro with the video for "Warped." After wielding his mic like a threatening penis, Anthony Kiedis makes out with the pouty newbie, who wears a dress, while Flea bounces around like an excited bisexual monkey. In just a few seconds, the band went further than any group of thrust rockers had gone before.

15

DO THE HUSTLE!

THE PET SHOP BOYS PAY THE RENT

From the Pet Shop Boys' 1987 album *Actually*, "Rent" – a tale of a boy and his sugar daddy – snuck the notion of male prostitution onto the radio ("I love you, you pay my rent"). A Top 10 hit in Britain, the allusions in "Rent" were too purple for U.S. release. "People always thought it was about that rent-boy arrangement," singer Neil Tennant said. "But in my head it's about a politician's mistress." To compound the definitely-not-gayness, they later recorded it with Liza Minnelli.

This page, clockwise from top left: Albert Sanchez/Corbis Outline; S.I.N./Corbis; Michael Ochs Archives.com. Opposite page: Michael Putland/Retna UK (Milli Vanilli); George Holz/Corbis Outline (98 Degrees); Fin Costello/Redferns/Retna Ltd. (Manowar)

14

MIDNIGHT MADNESS

THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW DEBUTS

On April Fool's Day 1976 — six months after *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*'s financially disastrous release — producers attempted to recoup losses by courting an audience that would appreciate its gender-bending humor: Greenwich Village freaks. Crowds flocked to midnight shows at NYC's Waverly Theater dressed as characters to stage elaborate scene reenactments. The cult phenomenon spread like gay wildfire across the country, turning the flop into a juggernaut.

13

MAN CRUSH!

FRANZ FERDINAND LUST AFTER "MICHAEL"

Ask anyone who's seen '70s heavy-leather footage: Gay dudes know how to get down. These Scottish fops clearly got the memo, tapping gay discos for inspiration on their horndog single "Michael." "You're the boy with all the leather hips," Alex Kapranos moans. "Sticky hair, sticky hips, stubble on my sticky lips." It's a glitter-bomb smuggled inside a sleek new-wave Trojan horse. So, is there more than skinny ties and stovepipe pants in Kapranos's closet? "It's called an imagination," he tells *Blender*.

12

ONLY IN NY, KIDS . . .

LOU REED TAKES A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE

Lou Reed had written about drag queens and persons of indeterminate gender "sucking on my ding-dong" with Velvet Underground, but nobody bought their records. Likewise, "Walk on the Wild Side" offered tales of transvestites and "fairies" giving head, but driven by David Bowie's commercial production and perhaps the most limp-wristed bassline in rock history, it was a Top 20 single, and America's number 1 jukebox hit in 1973. Manhattan's gay subculture had briefly gone mainstream.

11

THE GAY BLADE

SUPERMODEL SHAVES SUPERLESBIAN

Talk shows, columnists and DJs went into sweaty overload when the August 1993 *Vanity Fair* depicted America's swim-suited sweetheart Cindy Crawford "shaving" lesbian country singer k.d. lang. Shaving her chin, that is. Was it the dawning of lesbian chic, or an excuse for everyone to show pictures of hot young women getting it on? "The idea was to show my dream date, a beautiful woman . . . fawning over me," lang said. "But it was for fun. People read into it needlessly."

HOMO? NO! NO!

FOUR ACTS THAT, INCREDIBLY, AREN'T GAY*

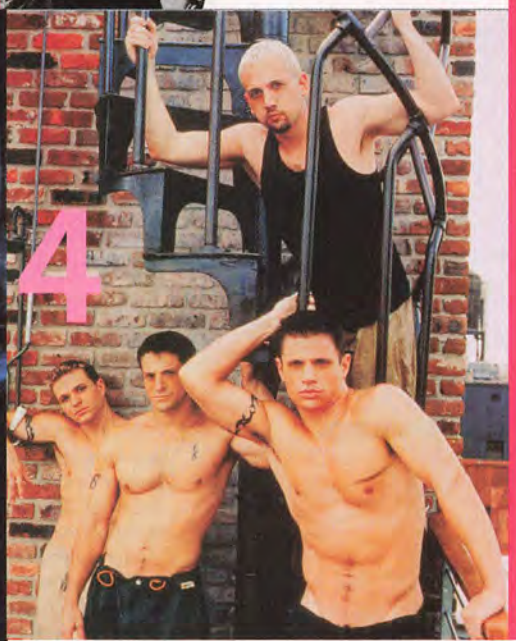
1 **MILLI VANILLI**
Didn't sing on their records. And probably didn't have sex with one another.

2 **MANOWAR**
Oiled-up and furry-codpiece-equipped yet probably not gay Tolkien rockers.

3 **HALL & OATES**
Were they? Weren't they? Mustache notwithstanding, they almost certainly weren't . . .

4 **98 DEGREES**
Six-pack-sporting but — we're 98% sure— not-gay-sex-enjoying Nick Lachey-led boy band.

* As far as we know . . .



ARE YOU A BIG GAY ROCK STAR?

Chart-topping straight guy or A-list queer eye? Let's find out!

1 You once canceled a show because . . .
a) You got herpes from a *Playboy* model.
b) You wanted to catch the last episode of *Ellen*.
c) "Hey, what are you trying to say?"

2 Describe your ideal groupie.
a) "Tight butt. Big boobs. Edible thong."
b) "Tight butt. Big moustache. Cop's uniform."
c) "I really don't like the way these questions are going."

3 Would you perform with t.A.T.u.?
a) "Who wouldn't? Hubba! Hubba!"
b) "Lipstick lesbians are sooo passé, sweetie."
c) "Look, I'm not friggin' gay, OK?"

4 Who are your musical idols?
a) Ozzy, Led Zeppelin, early Judas Priest
b) Liza, George Michael, late Judas Priest
c) "*The Enquirer* got it wrong. I thought he was a chick!"

5 Which is your favorite Cher video?
a) "That one where she shows her ass on that ship."
b) "Trick question — as if you could choose only one."
c) "That's it, I'm calling my lawyer . . . ."

IF YOU ANSWERED . . .

MOSTLY A: Congratulations, you're not gay. But that's no excuse for the mullet.

MOSTLY B: Congratulations, you *are* gay. Enjoy that same-sex sex!

MOSTLY C: Dude, get out of the closet. There's plenty of room out here!

10

GOTTA SING, GOTTA DANCE!

SKID ROW FRONT MAN DOES B'WAY

In 1989, Skid Row's Sebastian Bach caused a furor by wearing an "AIDS: Kills Fags Dead" T-shirt. It's funny what a few years of obscurity can do to a rock star's homophobia: On June 13, 2000, Bach replaced *Melrose Place*'s Jack Wagner in the Broadway musical *Jekyll and Hyde*. (You know, sequins, showtunes, Judy Garland!) This time, Bach saved his gay-baiting for skeptical fans. "I didn't pursue it, Broadway came to me," he said. "I'm just Sebastian Bach, and if you don't like it, suck me."

9

GIVE THE DRUMMER SOME

BOY GEORGE FINDS HIS MUSE

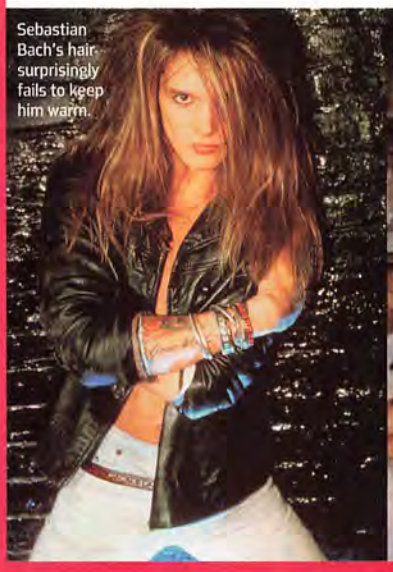
When transvestite Boy George enlisted drummer Jon Moss into the Culture Club, he found more than a collaborator: He got a lover and a muse, too! Moss inspired George's "lovey-dovey songs," including the breakthrough 1982 hit, "Do You Really Want to Hurt Me?" Their affair, however, was a disaster. Moss was for all intents and purposes straight, and they had vicious, often violent, fights. "Our love," George later said, "however diseased, was the creative force behind Culture Club."

8

EVERYONE IS GAY

KURT COBAIN GETS KISSED ON *SNL*

Once his music began to appeal to people with whom he would never hang out, Kurt Cobain tried to create a little distance — wearing fluttery dresses and writing "All Apologies," suggesting he and every guy who was listening could be gay. And in January 1992, Nirvana closed out their appearance on *Saturday Night Live* in subversive form: At closing credits, bassist Krist Novoselic bounded up to Cobain and drummer Dave Grohl and gave them both full, open-mouthed kisses.


Sebastian Bach's hair surprisingly fails to keep him warm.

"That's Rear Admiral Cher to you!"

7

EWWW!

MELISSA ETHERIDGE BORROWS SPERM

Bruce Springsteen, Tom Hanks and Brad Pitt were all rumored to be the father of celebrity lesbians Melissa Etheridge and Julie Cypher's kids. But in January 2000, they admitted the donor was druggy old walrus David Crosby. Cypher carried both children, but did she go retro-hetero to conceive? "No," she said, though adding that "no kitchen implements were involved." The women split in September 2000 and share custody of the kids.

6

HELLBENT FOR LEATHER!

JUDAS PRIEST'S ROB HALFORD CRACKS HIS WHIP

In October 1978, Rob Halford took sartorial inspiration from a London S&M store called Mr S. Cue the studs, leather and a bullwhip, which the gay Halford would crack on both a motorbike and willing fans during songs such as "Killing Machine," pertinently asking, "What manner of man am I?" This was not a question that troubled fans: After seeing Judas Priest live, an oblivious Nikki Sixx marveled that Halford must have got plenty of "pussy."

5

HELLO, SAILORS!

CHER MAKES THE GAYEST VIDEO EVER!

The 1989 video for "If I Could Turn Back Time" looked like something dreamed up by a committee of aging gym bunnies: Cher sings, straddling a vast cannon, surrounded by eager young sailors in full naval whites, wearing an outfit that exposes her tattooed ass. A horrified MTV refused to show it before 9 P.M. Cher recently claimed to be baffled by how she became a gay icon; maybe she also thinks we'll believe that's her real hair, too.

Rex USA (Sebastian Bach); John Jay Cabuay (illustration)

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4

GEDDIT?

FREDDIE MERCURY NAMES HIS BAND

Just before his band toured with Lynyrd Skynyrd in 1971, bisexual singer Freddie Mercury came up with the name Queen, which, he snickered, sounded "regal." Skynyrd realized its other connotations, but for decades, they were the only ones. Queen's stolidly hetero audience was so oblivious to the pun that when mildly androgynous new-wavers Teardrop Explodes supported Queen in 1982, Queen fans greeted the openers with homophobic abuse.

3

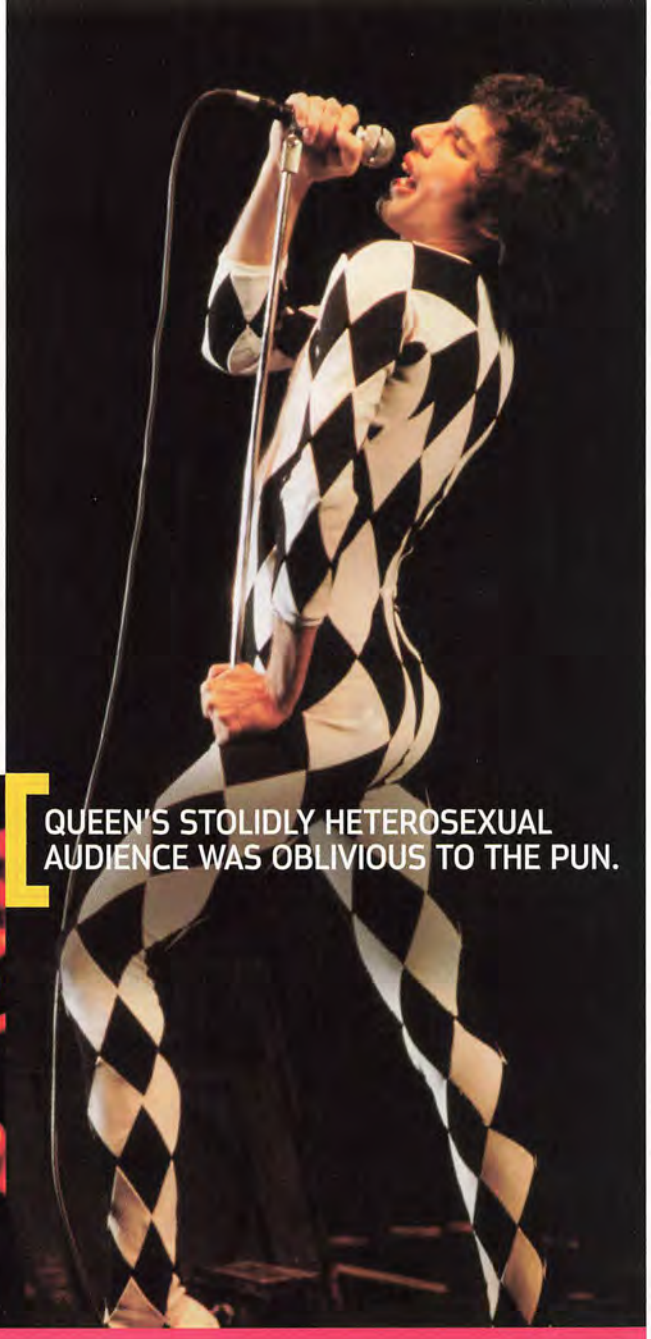
WHILE HE GO-GOS!

GEORGE MICHAEL BUSTED!

On April 7, 1998, former Wham! singer George Michael masturbated for an undercover cop in a "cruisy" public toilet at Will Rogers Memorial Park in Beverly Hills. He was arrested, sentenced to two years' probation and fined $910, but also came out after years of indecision. Michael later told the BBC that subconsciously, he may have wanted to be caught to "make my life about me." Later, his "Outside" video featured a reconstruction of the events with male dancers in police uniforms.

Boy George gay? Insane!

George Michael stars in *Tron! The Musical.*



QUEEN'S STOLIDLY HETEROSEXUAL AUDIENCE WAS OBLIVIOUS TO THE PUN.

2

Elton John: "Man, it's dark inside this closet."

QUEEN OF ENGLAND

ELTON JOHN COMES OUT. . . SORT OF

After years of heavy hints (camp outfits, the song "Daniel," an album called *Captain Fantastic and the Brown Dirt Cowboy*), Elton John said he was bisexual in an October 1976 interview. "I suppose it was a cop-out," he said in 1995, "but at the time, I thought, 'Let's be diplomatic.' " Regardless, his career nosedived. Though his homosexuality became an open secret in the music biz, he married a woman, recording engineer Renate Blauel, on Valentine's Day 1984, receiving a telegram from Rod Stewart's ex-manager reading: "You may still be standing but we're on the fucking floor."

He surprised no one by coming out as pure, no-additive gay shortly before the launch of his AIDS Foundation in 1992. "I used to have crushes on people, but not really any sex at all . . . until [I was] about 23. And then it was like a volcano," he later said. "When I went to therapy, my therapist said, 'I have to ask you if you were molested.' And I said, 'No, actually.' But I was *dying* to be molested by someone."

Clockwise from left: Michael Putland/Retna UK; ED/JM/Camera Press/Retna Ltd.; Neal Preston/Corbis; Terry O'Neill/Camera Press/Retna Ltd.

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"Hi there, have you considered letting homosexuality into your life?"

1 THE VILLAGE PEOPLE CHECK INTO THE YMCA

The Young Men's Christian Association was founded to promote Bible study. The Village People were founded to promote sodomy. Something had to give . . . .

BY ROB TANNENBAUM

"Y.M.C.A." IS A CUTE, clean song about a dirty subject. A number-2 pop giant in 1978, it's been played at millions of ball games, thousands of bar mitzvahs, and sung in public by Secretary of State Colin Powell. Which is a pretty odd and unexpected history for a song about men showering together.

OK, nothing in the song is expressly gay. But in the '70s, long before *Will & Grace* aired on primetime TV, sex songs were written in code: "Afternoon Delight," which is as filthy as any Prince track, sounded like a soap commercial. So when the Village People directed a confused "young man" to a private place where "you can have a good time" and "hang out with all the boys" the subtext was clear: buggery.

Jacques Morali, the bossy, insecure French producer who devised the idea of a costumed group of macho archetypes, noticed a YMCA in the Chelsea area of New York and asked the band, in broken English, "What is YMCA?" Morali was gay, and the songs he wrote for the Village People coyly referred to Fire Island, San Francisco and other elements of queer culture. With their muscles, mustaches and leather pants, the Village People were the gayest act America had ever seen until B2K. And "Y.M.C.A.," written in 20 minutes, was even more cartoonishly exuberant ("There's no need!/ To!/Be!/ Unhappy!") than other disco hits of the era. If *this* traffic cop pulled you over, you really might not mind.

A few months after its release, *American Bandstand* host Dick Clark booked the Village People on a TV variety show he hosted. "The YMCA people called and threatened to sue us if we played the song," Clark tells *Blender*. "They were very, very uptight about it."

"The Y wasn't sure what it thought about the song," Ken Gladish, national executive director of the YMCA of the U.S.A., admits. "There was a lot of controversy."

The Young Men's Christian Assocation was founded in 1844 by religious leaders eager to isolate men from female temptation and encourage Bible study. Over the years, ironically, the male-only enclaves became known as safe meeting places for closeted gays. One Y pamphlet from 1909 warned against the presence of "lisping" men.

THE GAYEST MOMENT EVER!

In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson's Chief of Staff was arrested for having sex with a man in the restroom of a Y two blocks from the White House.

Today, the Y no longer objects to the song, and plays it at official Y events. (Gladish even admits to having done the "Y.M.C.A." dance. "Come on, are you kidding?") Whether through repetition or the mainstreaming of gay culture, the song seems to have lost its power to shock.

"It's a party staple," says Eric Cutler, president of M&M Entertainment in Boca Raton, Florida, which produces 150 bar mitzvahs and corporate events a year. "Eighty percent of the parties have to have it. It's a song everybody can dance to."

At banquet halls across America, Aunt Sylvia and Grandpa Barney dance happily to a song about men meeting men in secret. The song has nearly become a national anthem — like the "Star Spangled Banner," but with *real* spangles. This summer in Indonesia, Colin Powell sang a revised version of the song ("President Bush, he said to me, 'Colin, I need you to run the Department of State' ") at the ASEAN Forum, an annual security meeting for foreign ministers. Though the event was off-limits to reporters, a videotape appeared on CNN — like 50 Cent, Powell had been bootlegged.

When *Blender* asked if the Secretary of State is a big Village People fan, a spokesman sighed uncomfortably and said, "This is not something that should have been made public." It was good to see that Jacques Morali's gaytastic march could still make someone uncomfortable. [BLENDER]

Lynn Goldsmith/Corbis

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"YOU'RE FIRED!"

Drugs! Depression! Moving back in with Mom! With more bands than ever getting dropped by their labels, *Blender* finds out what becomes of musicians after they get sacked. The answer? Nothing good . . . .

BY CLARK COLLIS

STEPHEN SEALS SAYS it felt like getting "pounded in the ass."

"The night my band got dropped, we were playing a show in Orlando," the 32-year-old guitarist says. "We got the call and then we had to go onstage and listen to a whole club full of people singing the chorus of our single back to us. I looked at my singer and we laughed harder than we had laughed in our entire lives. It was impossible to believe how much the rug had been pulled from under us."

Seals's band, Atlanta-based rock quartet Ether Seeds, signed a record deal with Roadrunner Records in March 2002. The guitarist then spent two months "pouring my heart and soul" into making an album. But just four weeks after their lead single went to radio, and before its parent CD had even come out, Roadrunner Records released the band from its contract. "For no good reason," Seals adds.

"I dubbed that the 'Dropped' tour," he says with a laugh. "We got dropped, the headlining band on the tour got dropped, the band that replaced us on the tour got dropped. And, once you're dropped, man, you are dropped *off the face of the earth*. When I was on the road, I would spend 12 hours a day managing e-mails and phone calls and band business. But, once we got dropped, I came home and there were no e-mails. There were no phone calls. And nobody gave a shit."

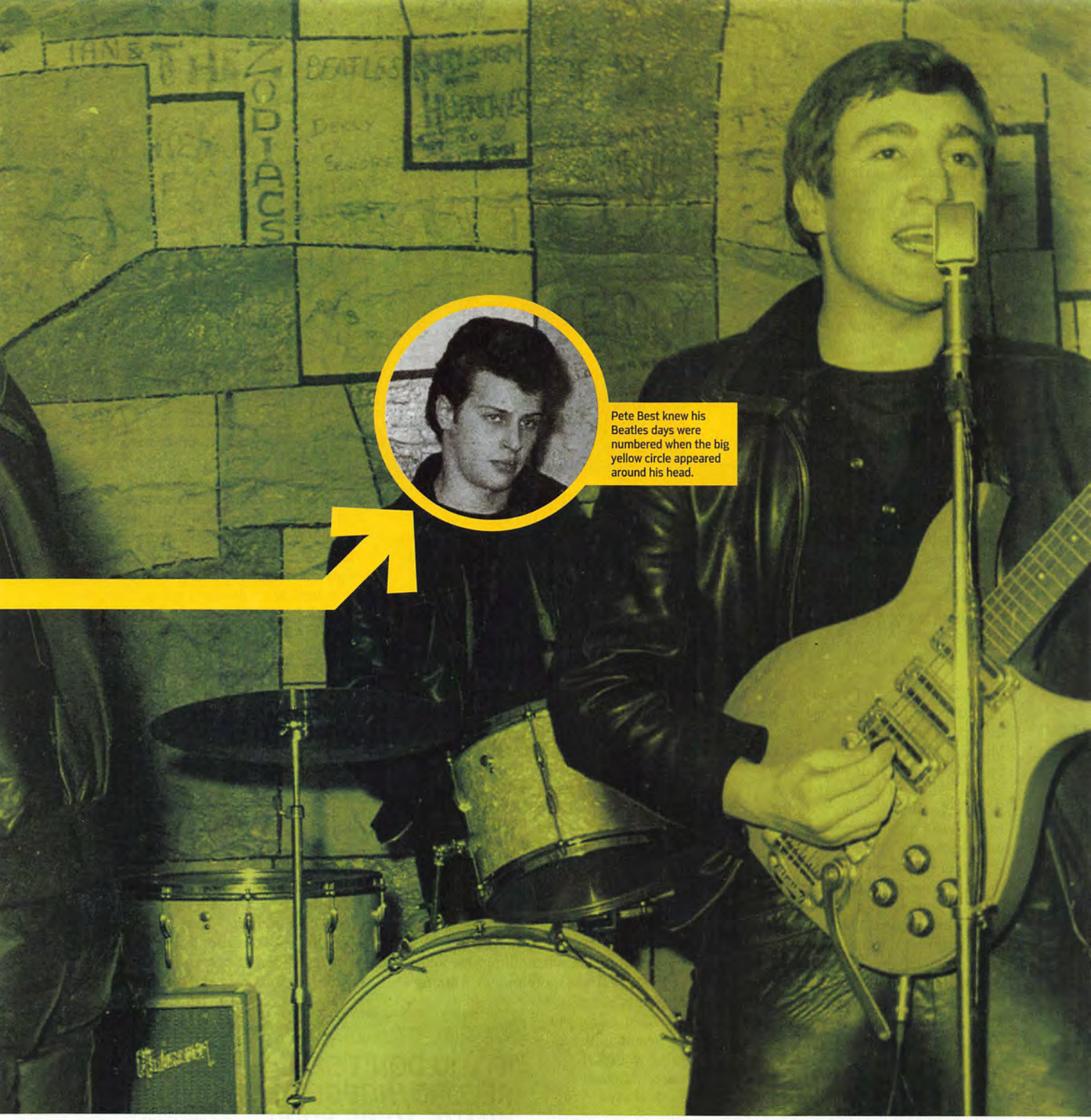
★ ★ ★ ★ ★

THERE ISN'T ANYTHING new about record companies firing their artists. Some of the most famous names in music, including Frank Sinatra, Johnny Cash, 50 Cent and Wilco, have at one time or another been told not to let the corporate door hit their asses on the way out.

But these days, due to a toxic combination of plunging record sales and corporate mergers, being made redundant from your job in rock is more common than it's ever been. Getting dropped, it seems, is the new getting signed.

Last spring, it was announced that approximately 85 acts were being let go from the Warner Music Group after its purchase by Seagram heir Edgar

Courtesy of NBC Photo (Donald Trump); Michael Ochs Archives.com (Beatles)



Pete Best knew his Beatles days were numbered when the big yellow circle appeared around his head.

Bronfman Jr. who, in a drastic cost-cutting measure, folded Elektra into its sister label, Atlantic Records. At least that many acts could find themselves label-less following the merger of industry giants Sony and BMG this past August. And for many bands on other labels, the future is not much rosier.

"Because of falling record sales, everything's becoming streamlined," says Karen Glauber, president of the music-industry trade magazine *Hits*. "There were a number of consecutive weeks this year where no CD broke 100,000 in sales — not too long ago, everything in the Top 10 was easily selling a couple of hundred thousand copies. You can't sustain an enormous roster of bands when record sales aren't healthy."

"ONCE DROPPED, YOU'RE DROPPED *OFF THE FACE OF THE EARTH.*" STEPHEN SEALS, ETHER SEEDS

Watching besuited Wall Street types getting shit-canned by Donald Trump on *The Apprentice* may be great entertainment. But in real life, losing your job is one of the most devastating things that can happen to you. A 2002 study commissioned by the International Stress Management Association showed that being fired was beaten out only by serious illness or the death of a close relation as the most stressful thing that can happen to you. And the effect on a musician, whether dropped by a label or sacked from a band, can be doubly crushing.

★ "YOU'RE FIRED!"

After 50 Cent was dropped from Columbia in 2000, "the phone calls stopped coming," says the rapper's friend and fellow G-Unit member Tony Yayo. "In this industry, you've got a lot of fake friends. Once you sell a record, you've got all these people smiling in your fucking face like they knew you for years. If you don't sell a record, *nobody* wants to be your friend."

"On *Loveline*, every night we have a rock band or a celebrity," says Dr. Drew Pinsky, the radio host and medical director of the Department of Chemical Dependency Services at Pasadena's Las Encinas Hospital. "And I started doing research on our guests. What we've found is that rock stars got less attention and experienced more tragedy in their pasts, and *need* a highly receptive audience to motivate them. So, when they get dropped, or asked to leave by their bandmates, this is far more than just someone losing their job. These guys, they're losing their *identity*."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

LOCATED IN WHAT *Blender*'s taxi driver charmingly describes as the "whore district" of Flint, Michigan, the Machine Shop is the kind of venue up-and-coming bands play in the hope of cultivating a grassroots following. But Apartment 26, the band counting down the hours until show time on their tour bus, is neither up nor coming. At least that is the assessment of their record label, Atlantic, who seven weeks ago announced that, following disappointing sales of their first album for the company, they were being dropped.

The half-British, half-American quintet claim that they regard being dismissed as a blessing, that the label had long since "left the party." Guitarist Jon Greasley is determined that the band will carry on. He confesses, however, that last year, while waiting for Atlantic to put out their debut album for the label, he was forced to work in a warehouse. Unless they sign to another label soon, he will probably go back and work there again.

Bassist Louis Macan, 24, meanwhile, has had enough. The day after they were dropped Macan announced his intention of leaving the band at the end of their current tour. On stage tonight, the bassist will look like the dictionary definition of a metal mutha as he pounds his instrument, long curly hair flying in all directions. But, now, his voice is sad and almost inaudibly soft as he explains that he'll probably have to get a "normal job."

Ether Seeds with Stephen Seals (*far left*)

Sinatra, was dropped from Columbia in 1952

50 Cent, dropped from Columbia in 2000

It is a job he'll have to get without the benefit of a college degree. Following graduation, Macan had intended to go to college in the U.K. But then the band landed a slot on Ozzfest.

"When we got the Ozzfest tour, I ended up calling the university and saying, 'Sorry, I'm not going to be able to attend,' " Macan says. "We were thinking, 'This is it!' My family was very supportive initially. But after a few years, they were like, 'Have you ever thought about getting a job?' I've found the last six months very emotionally draining. I have a wife at home who I would love to be spending time with. And the money we made was nothing. I would easily have made more money working at Burger King."

"Being dropped is the end of the rainbow experience," Michael Laskoff says. A former record company executive and author of the self-help book *Landing On the Right Side Of Your Ass: A Survival Guide For the Recently Unemployed*, Laskoff adds, "You discover that what you thought was a barrel of gold is actually a bucket of piss."

It is easy to paint the the record industry as the villain here — goateed monkeys in suits with insatiable sushi habits. But the truth is that a lot of company personnel are also losing their jobs due to these mergers. And those that remain view the dropping of bands as a tragic, if sadly inevitable, event.

"It's horrible when people get dropped" says Josh Sarubin, vice-president of A&R at Island/Def Jam. "I've been doing this for 14 years and I've made the call many times and it's very personally distressing. I always feel, when I've signed an act, that it's kind of a part of me. When they get dropped, it's like your child is leaving you, or worse. But so much stuff was signed in the past 10 years that, as companies shrunk, they just didn't have the funds. A lot of these deals were *insane* — million-dollar deals for rock bands that couldn't *possibly* recoup."

A week after *Blender*'s trip to Flint, we have lunch in New York with Jacob Slichter. A quietly thoughtful man, he was the drummer with the trio Semisonic, who scored a massive hit in 1998 with "Closing Time." But their album, *Feeling Strangely Fine*, was deemed a commercial disappointment by their record company, MCA, and they were dropped.

After his manager called to break the news, Slichter went for a walk and came across a billboard which had once featured a massive picture of the band.

"A year earlier, our faces had been on this huge billboard — but right then I just felt really small," he says.

"It's a humbling experience. Absolutely. All our friends and family, they thought of us as big rock stars. And my expectations were out of control. I rented a *second* apartment. I got a *second* couch. A *second* color TV. I bought expensive clothes and was just ready to start having a bunch of celebrity friends and everything. And now I had to think, 'What the fuck am I going to do?' "

"IF YOU DON'T SELL A RECORD, *NOBODY* WANTS TO BE YOUR FRIEND." TONY YAYO, G-UNIT

With Semisonic on "extended hiatus," Slichter wrote a book, *So You Wanna Be a Rock & Roll Star*, which told the story of his band's rise and fall. It also stopped him becoming too depressed about the entire situation. But when *Blender* asks Slichter what advice he would give other musicians who find themselves in a similar situation, he pauses for a long time.

From top: Courtesy of Ether Seeds; LFI; Kevin Knight/Corbis Outline

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Cuban: "And you're fired, too!"

SUPER-RICH SACKER!

HOW TO FIRE SOMEONE (AND NOT HATE YOURSELF THE NEXT DAY)

Mark Cuban, outspoken owner of the Dallas Mavericks and star of the reality series *The Benefactor*, offers five tips to music execs on how best to issue that pink slip

1 DON'T SAY YOU'RE FIRING SOMEONE 'CAUSE THEY'RE CRAP
"Never do that. Because who knows what they're going to do? There are some total crazies out there. And lunatics are the hardest people to fire."

2 HAVE A GOOD EXCUSE
"That's what makes it bearable — because then it's not the person's fault. 'We're cutting back.' 'The economy is bad.' 'We lost this big customer.' 'It's not that your music sucks, it's just there's all this free downloading.' "

3 BE GENEROUS
"Sometimes you just give people a bunch of money. It makes them feel better. It makes me feel better!"

4 LOOK ON THE BRIGHT SIDE
"You can do someone a favor by firing them. Sometimes people take jobs that are over their head. I've had people thank me for firing them."

5 HAVE FUN FIRING ASSHOLES!
"If someone is a total asshole it can be fun to fire them! But you don't want to convey that personal joy to the person. That just gives them a reason for revenge."

"It's so hard," he says, finally. "The music industry is really caving in. But you might do well to shrink your expectations down. Think about getting a part-time job. And put your plans for swimming pools and sports cars on hold."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

THERE WAS A TIME when those plans were very much being made by Cliff Hendricks, whose story acts as a dire final warning to anyone still under the impression that being in a signed band is the end of all your problems. In the fall of 2001, Hendricks was just another bass-player dreaming of rock stardom. It was a dream somewhat at odds with the fact that his job as a tech support worker wasn't even paying him enough to allow the 25 year old to move out of his parents' house in Florida. Then he successfully auditioned for Course of Nature, an Alabama-based, Creed-ish band who had just recorded their debut for the Lava/Atlantic label. Shortly after joining the band, they had a minor hit with their song "Caught In the Sun," and Hendricks found his dream become a reality.

"It was *awesome*," he tells *Blender*. "It was rags to riches overnight. I spent a lot of money. We all did. All the clothes you thought were cool, all of a sudden you can buy them."

But the band's album never really took off. Something, it seemed, was wrong. And before long the rest of the band had come to the conclusion that that something was Hendricks, whom they fired at a band meeting in May 2002. The split was relatively friendly and Hendricks even agreed to play a couple of more shows while a replacement was found. But, less than a year after leaving his old room at his parents' home, Hendricks found himself right back there again.

"I JUST GOT WASTED EVERY NIGHT TILL 5 IN THE MORNING."
CLIFF HENDRICKS, COURSE OF NATURE

"That was super-miserable, man," Hendricks says. "I had some money left over, and I just got wasted every night till about 5 in the morning. Then I would just lie in bed and think miserable thoughts. Most of my good friends from school I'm not friends with anymore because they saw you on *Carson Daly* or saw you play a show and pick up four women at once and they're jealous. . . . That's a shitty, shitty part."

Hendricks eventually moved out of his parents' home, but with the money gone, he began looking for work. It hasn't been easy to find. "I'm sending out résumés and stuff right now," he says. "It's hard, though. When you're on tour, you lose tenure in the workplace."

Hendricks says he doesn't regret the experience, and still dreams about playing music for a living. "But after awhile, you've just got to resign yourself to your fate," he says. "And that fate is, you're basically fucked."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

NOT ALL OF the artists *Blender* spoke to were quite so fatalistic in outlook. Some actually regard being dropped positively, as an opportunity to start anew, free from a record label that had long since lost interest in them. Adam Krier of Chicago's Lucky Boys Confusion says that being dropped by Elektra

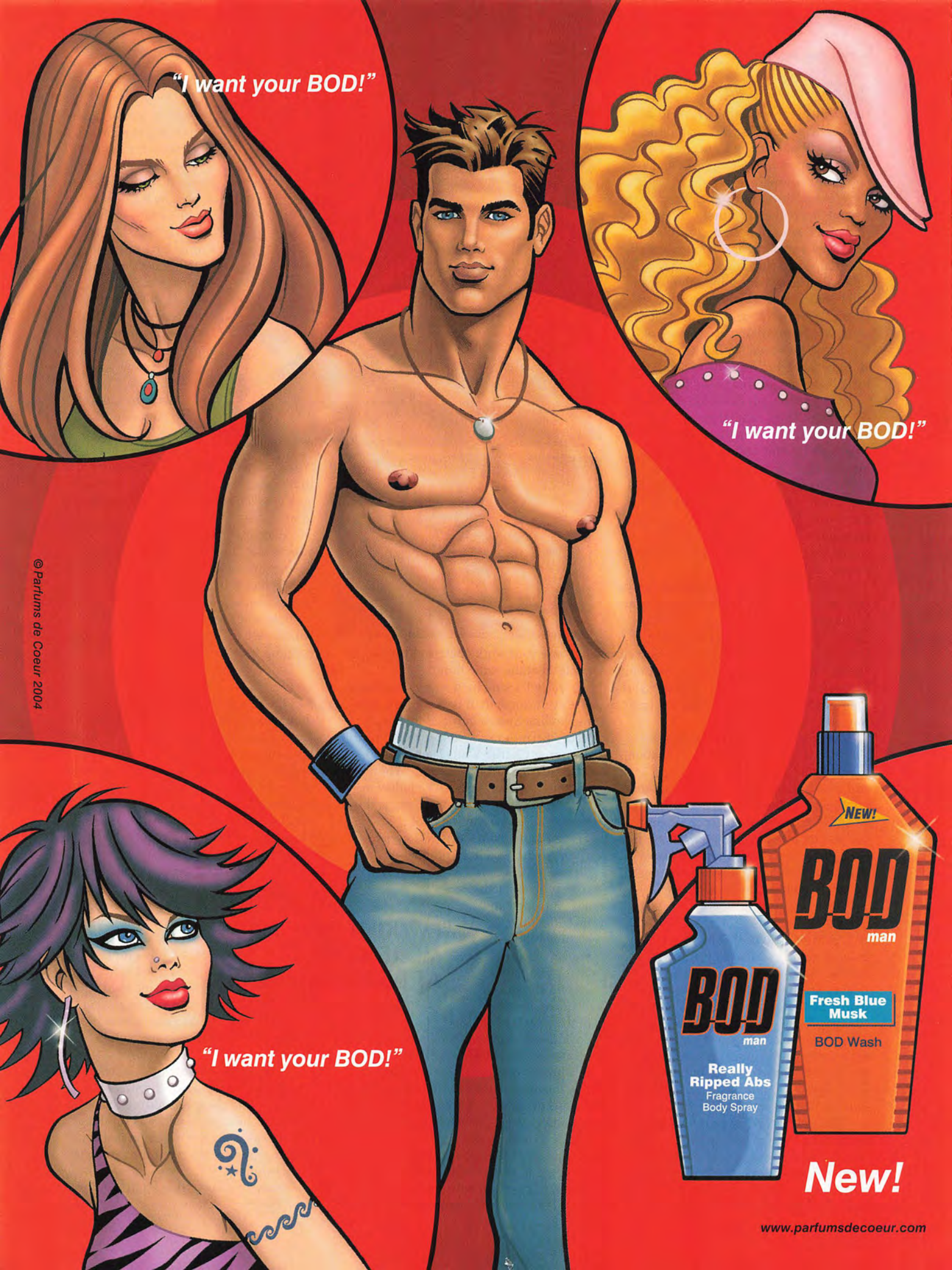
Course of Nature's Cliff Hendricks

AU REVOIR!

Apartment 26 with Louis Macan (*second from left*)

Semisonic with Jacob Slichter (*far right*)

Clockwise from left: LM Otero/Associated Press/AP; Courtesy of Cliff Hendricks; Frank Micelotta/Getty Images; Courtesy of Apartment 26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earlier this year was "embarrassing, but also an inspiration. Now we can do what we like without having someone saying 'Can't you make this song three and a half minutes long?' "

More positive spin comes from Ryland Steen, the drummer with Audiovent, who were signed to Atlantic until they were "half asked to leave, half got dropped." Steen is hopeful they will sign a deal elsewhere, although the band will have to do so without their lead singer, Jason Boyd, who left after their departure from Atlantic. Nevertheless, Steen says he would "rather be on an indie label that really cares about the band than a major that doesn't."

It is a sentiment that Scott McCloud, singer with Girls Against Boys, could not agree with more. In the late '90s, the New York quartet was one of the most hyped in the country, and, following an intense bidding war, the band signed to Geffen. "There was a great feeling that finally all these assholes are paying attention to us," McCloud says. "But I was also thinking, 'Wait a minute, this is absurd, delusional.' "

Girls Against Boys' first album for the label was not a big hit. Geffen were legally obliged to release two more CDs but, claims McCloud, never approved any of the band's demos, effectively halting their career. "We were dropped, but we weren't dropped," he says. "It was really stressful. There were fights — it got bad. We just wanted to make a record."

Eventually, the group's lawyers were able to extricate them from the situation, but the band's members, exhausted and disillusioned by the experience, soon put the group on semi-permanent hold. When *Blender* speaks to McCloud, he has just returned from Spain, where the band played their first shows in two and a half years. "Now it's just for the music," he says brightly. "The career's over."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

IF GETTING DROPPED by your label is painful, getting sacked by your own band may be the cruelest cut of all. Early Beatles drummer Pete Best was told by manager Brian Epstein in 1962 that "the boys" just didn't think he was good enough. Unable to cope with his ex-bandmates' ever-growing success, he tried to gas himself. Best survived, but never really recovered from the sacking. "It bleeds, it heals, but the scar's still there. . . . "

"Being whacked by your own band must be like you're getting fired and divorced at the same time," author Michael Laskoff says. "Your friends are effectively saying to you, 'We don't think you're talented *and* we don't like you.' You lose your work circle and your social circle all at the same time."

Wilco with Jay Bennett

G N' R with Steven Adler

Indeed, many fired musicians would fare even worse than Best. In June 1969, the Rolling Stones dumped their onetime leader Brian Jones. "I felt sorry for him," drummer Charlie Watts later recalled. "I'm sure it nearly killed him." There are those who say it did: The following month, his body was found lying at the bottom of his swimming pool.

Cut loose from Guns N' Roses in 1990 for drug-induced unreliability, Steven Adler's narcotic problem actually worsened and he suffered a cocaine-induced stroke, a heart attack and then a second stroke.

Most recently, in this year's Metallica documentary *Some Kind of Monster*, Dave Mustaine was shown hysterically railing in a group-therapy session over the way his bandmates had sacked him *two decades* previously. After being fired from Metallica, Mustaine would later find success with Megadeth.

But most fired musicians must face up to the fact that their professional profile has been greatly downsized. One artist currently learning to embrace a more "selective" audience is former Wilco guitarist Jay Bennett, who, in August 2001, was dismissed, he says, by band leader Jeff Tweedy with the words "a circle can only have one center." The pair have barely spoken since.

"I called [Jeff Tweedy] the day that Joe Strummer died," Bennett says over the phone from Chicago. "The Clash meant a lot to both of us. So I called Jeff and he said — and I quote — 'Yeah, it's a bummer, isn't it? I don't think I ever want to talk to you again, goodbye.' Those are the last words he said to me."

Since leaving the band, Bennett admits that "there have been ups and downs. I've dealt with it. But I don't have any problems being a solo artist. I'll play to 300 people and that's a blast. I run a studio and I've got everything I need without the . . . you know . . . bad karma hanging from ceiling."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

AFTER THE ETHER Seeds were dropped, Stephen Seals says that they spent a long time "just being really fucking depressed." Now, after a name change to One For Nothing, the quartet are shopping around for another deal. But Seals admits that it will be a problem overcoming the perception that they are now "damaged goods." He also admits that, financially speaking, he's struggling to make ends meet.

"It has been the most humbling year of my life," Seals says. "Before I was ever in a signed band, I was in suit-and-tie job making around $50,000 a year. Now I have my first menial job since high school."

Seals works as a bouncer in a bar.

"I was driving down the street the other day and there was a store that sells car tires," he says. "And I was thinking, 'There was a day when I could just say, "My car tires are worn out, I'm going to get new ones." ' "

"Now," he says, "that's a dream for me." [BLENDER]

"I WOULD HAVE MADE MORE MONEY AT BURGER KING."
LOUIS MACAN, APARTMENT 26

From top: Beth Herzhaft/Corbis Outline; Ilpo Musto/LFI

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WALK ON WATER!

BY ADRIAN DEEVOY ★ PHOTOGRAPHY BY PEROU

THEY DRINK VINTAGE WINES, FLY IN PRIVATE JETS AND, UM, OWN SHEEP. BUT U2 MAY HAVE ALSO JUST MADE THE BEST RECORD OF THEIR LIVES. "YOU CAN'T LIVE LIKE THIS," BONO SAYS, "AND PUT OUT A CRAP ALBUM!"

U2, from left:
Larry Mullen Jr.,
Adam Clayton,
Bono and the Edge

THE SOUTH OF FRANCE isn't everyone's *tasse de thé*. Too much sun, too much money, too much of a reminder that the world divides unevenly into the have-nots and the have-yachts.

But this slender strip of the Côte D'Azur at least attempts to buck that big-buck trend. Eze-sur-mer, situated on the coast-hugging road between Nice and Monaco, could almost be described as bohemian. Almost.

The Papaya Beach bar is just the sort of joint James Bond would choose to shake the sand out of his shorts after a spume-spattered encounter with Ursula Andress: straw ceilings, wood floors, attentive but first-name-friendly owners. Depending on the tide, the ocean is either a five or 25-second walk away.

Such is the carefully considered comfort of U2's universe that even waiting for them is a pleasure these days. Fresh fruit is juiced, low-sodium sea-air plays in your hair and another platter of carb-free hors d'oeuvres arrives as if by magic.

Gazing out toward the turquoise horizon, you can't help but notice a large yacht moored to your right. This vast vessel is owned by billionaire Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen.

"That's not a yacht," croaks a familiar voice. "It's a bloody big ship."

Bono adjusts his cowboy hat, the better to take in the boat. "It's got two helicopter pads on it as well," he says, puzzled. "What Paul wants two for I've got no idea. Arrivals and departures perhaps?"

"There's a recording studio onboard, too, and a full-time sound engineer," adds the man everyone calls the Edge, who has just arrived on foot.

"And something like 60 suites," says Adam Clayton, ghosting into the bar.

Ever the king of the deadpan one-liner, Larry Mullen Jr., has the final word. "That is a ferry," he declares. "A ferry with very influential friends."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

THERE IS A CERTAIN joy in watching U2 reunite. Even if they have seen each other the previous evening, they greet like old friends after a long war. They neither hug nor gush, but there is a touching warmth as they salute the other members of their band. A band, lest we forget, whose career has now exceeded that of even Elvis Presley.

← "I surrender! The mullet goes tomorrow!" Bono and band live in 1983. (*Above*) U2 in Atlanta in 1981.

"What?" Bono says, always on the sniff for a new sound bite. "U2 have been together longer than Elvis? That's brilliant! Can I use it?"

Go on, then. It's on *Blender*.

"Have I mentioned," Bono improvises, "that we've been together longer than Elvis?"

U2 are actually 25 this year: That's a quarter century of their holy rock & roll. By way of celebration, the Edge (*né* David Evans) orders a cold beer, Clayton — off the booze now for the best part of a decade — opts in passable French for a dainty coffee and a glass of water. Mullen contents himself with some nibbles while Bono (Paul Hewson in a past life) tucks into *Blender*'s drink, blind to the trifling concept of beverage ownership.

We have convened today to discuss the state of the U2 nation, their intriguing take on the world, and their eleventh studio album, *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb*. But before we can contemplate the latter and its bewildering title, U2 has some business to attend to and politely invites *Blender* to sit in on an impromptu band meeting.

"We're not fully agreed on what to do here," Bono explains, "so maybe you should vote, too."

The problem, if it can be called that, lies in the album's running order. After numerous attempts, U2 have yet to find a satisfactory flow, leading them to believe that there may be too many songs. So, right now, they must decide which tunes should be sacrificed.

As it stands, the album is three seconds shy of an hour and, as Bono says, "too much of a good thing is a bad thing," so drastic measures need to be taken.

"I have a theory," Mullen begins, and a reverential silence descends as the drummer — traditionally the first band member to be shouted down in these situations — states his case. After just five minutes, it has been unanimously decided that the track "Mercy," a six-and-a-half-minute outpouring of U2 at its most uninhibitedly U2-ish, must go.

Styling: Sharon Blankson; hair: Dylan Bradshaw; grooming: J. Maskrey. From top: UrbanImage.tv/Adrian Boot; Erica Echenberg/Retna Ltd.

BOB HEWSON'S PASSING AND ITS EFFECT ON HIS SON BONO RUN THROUGH THE ALBUM LIKE A RIVER.

Perou

Hence a song that any self-respecting band would be proud to call a single becomes what Bono immediately anoints "the best B-side you've ever heard."

Later, another more experimental candidate entitled "Fast Cars" ("an Irish/Mexican vibe") gets evicted, and the album becomes a lean and lithe 11 tracks.

"Without sounding totally phony," Bono says, "I think this might be our second best — if not our best — album. It's up there with *Achtung* [*Baby*]. It had to be. You can't live like this and put out a crap album or else people are going to want to shoot you."

Before the meeting winds up, Bono feels duty-bound to explain the album's "sort of spooky, '60s-ish" title.

"We've always found it appropriate to what the whole album deals with," he says. "I was telling my mate Gavin Friday that I felt it was a great name for the album. And Gavin said, 'Well, you know what that's all about?' I'm like, 'What?' And Gavin had it spot-on. He said, 'It's all about your dad.' "

Bob Hewson's passing — he died in August 2001 from cancer, at age 75 — and its effect on his son run through the album like a river.

Blender reminds Bono of something he had said in a private moment at the time of his father's death, during the Elevation tour. "I'm an orphan now," Bono said. (He lost his mother, Iris, when he was 14.)

"I remember that conversation," Bono says with a sigh, his pale blue eyes crinkling behind yellow shades. "That whole time, doing the gig, flying home every night to see the old man, sitting by the bed, still fighting . . . ."

Bono's relationship with his dad is tenderly documented on *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb*, directly on "Sometimes You Can't Make It On Your Own" (which U2 played at Hewson's funeral) and "One Step Closer to Knowing," and indirectly on "All Because of You" and "Crumbs From Your Table."

"These are the most direct and concise lyrics we've done," says the Edge thoughtfully. "There's no hiding behind mysterious metaphors."

Yet, as with much of Bono's writing, the personal becomes universal and the universal personal. Songs directly addressed to his "Da" could as easily be about a lover, a country or the entire human race. →

10 IMPERTINENT QUESTIONS FOR U2

The rock legends on supermodels, hair loss and the "fat fella"

HEY, BONO!
You're 44, dude! Isn't it time to put the leather trousers away?
"I did put them away, but then I got into the old leatherette in the early '90s. Hmm, warm leatherette. You have to tread very carefully with shorts and leather trousers. And as for leather shorts. . . ."

HEY, LARRY!
Get a real bike! Don't you know Harleys are for pussies?
"What can I tell you? Put some class on your ass, ride a Harley. I hate the idea of being a weekend warrior, but I'll go for a decent-length ride now and again."

HEY, ADAM!
Are you done with all those supermodels?
"I have. But they just won't leave me alone."

HEY, EDGE!
Why don't you put the effects pedals away and play a proper tune?
"I think we have. But sometimes our best songs come out of those weird sounds. 'Beautiful Day' came about because of Brian Eno's loop, so don't knock it!"

HEY, LARRY!
Why you still rockin' the James Dean look?
"I'm not only still rockin' it, I'm still workin' it.

HEY, ADAM!
Ever thought about playing all the strings on the bass and not just the thickest one?
"Some people need to play the thinner strings. I don't. I'm happy with the fat fella."

HEY, BONO!
Have you, like, totally forgotten how to party?
"I think it was Marianne Faithfull – who knows about these things – who said decadence is not about living the life and tasting the finest wine but having the finest wine and not tasting it. I think she called it 'the sweet aroma of spoiled opportunity.'"

HEY, EDGE!
When are you gonna let us see what's left underneath the hat?
"Hats off, *Blender*, to the most original question ever. Albeit slightly hair-ist."

HEY, LARRY!
When are you gonna quit those arty rhythms and play some real rock drums?
"I'm practicing, man. Give me a chance."

HEY, ADAM!
Please tell us you're not going get your cock out on this sleeve.
"I think I might retire that old friend . . . for now." *ADRIAN DEEVOY*

"It struck me again and again when we were making the record," Bono marvels. "A song about a specific time, a particular person or incident would suddenly sound like it was written about Africa or some great global theme, which, of course, as a writer, you must *never* try or you'll burst through sheer pretentiousness. Which can be terribly messy."

He laughs, but despite his high spirits today (when asked where his head is at he promptly replies, "About to be wedged right up *Blender*'s arse!") there's an untouchable sadness about Bono. "Funny, isn't it?" he exhales, having anticipated the turn in the conversation. "The 'man' thing, growing up." He breaks off to quote a new lyric. "Hey, Edge!" Bono shouts. "I've been born again, and again and again and again."

"THERE WERE TIMES WHEN WE NEEDED BONO AND HE WASN'T AROUND." THE EDGE

There is a strong feeling in the U2 camp that it's good to have Bono back. Throughout the making of 2000's *All That You Can't Leave Behind*, the band's frontman had become so immersed in the laudable but all-consuming Jubilee 2000 campaign — a political and economic initiative to write off Third World debt — he appeared to have forgotten about the day job.

While three-quarters of U2 sweated, singerless, in the studio, Bono was spending time on Capitol Hill persuading senators and captains of industry to pardon millions of dollars' worth of profit.

"We were worried about how far Bono was getting into it," the Edge admits. "If only for himself. It all worked out in the end, but there were times when we needed him and he wasn't around. There were a few tense moments, definitely."

But this time round, Bono is fully on message. Although he has wholeheartedly taken up the cause of bringing to the world media the horror of AIDS in Africa, he hasn't shirked in his duty to U2.

That said, first-time listeners may come away with the belief that this is "an Edge album." Guitars — great, chiming armies of them — come at you from all angles. He even dusts off his echo-laden clang that once prompted Bob Dylan to remark to Bono, "Everyone's going to remember your songs, it's just that nobody's gonna be able to play 'em."

Edge chuckles. "You get into that thing where you're worried that you →

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sound too much like yourself. But that's what I sound like. I can't help it, that's how I play the guitar. I think I just stopped worrying about it."

"There's even a reference to *Boy*," Bono boasts, and mimics the guitar harmonics that baffled more conventionally minded musicians back in 1980.

"*Drang, dur-ang!*"

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

BLENDER IS IN the shower the following morning when Bono calls. But, as any friend of the Sonic Leprechaun will confirm, he's not a man easily deterred by voicemail. He chats freely, and even gives regular weather reports.

Bono has been up for hours, boxing — getting in shape for the upcoming world tour — listening to music, strolling on the beach, jotting down ideas.

"I've been trying to meet the muse on the way home rather than walking her home," he jokes, but, being Bono, he's also had a few more serious thoughts.

"I don't know whether we should talk about the Presidential election," he says. "You see, I'm not going to come down on one side or another. I'm bipartisan. There, I've come out and said it. So it might be a cool thing not to discuss it anyway. I dunno."

A month later, Bono and his wife Ali are in bold attendance as John Kerry makes his Democratic Convention acceptance speech (with its suspiciously Bono-like "I'm reporting for duty" opener). The speech segues seamlessly into U2's "Beautiful Day."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

BACK AT THE PAPAYA Beach bar, Larry Mullen, U2's ageless drummer, casually lifts his shirt, revealing abs on which you could grate carrots. The intake of breath from the women — and a few of the men — in the room is audible. Oblivious to this sudden lack of oxygen, Mullen idly scratches his stomach and lowers his narrow behind onto a convenient sofa.

Bono will tell you two facts about Larry Mullen Jr. (and rarely has the "Junior" been so apt): He is resistant to the ravages of time because, like Dorian Gray, he keeps a painting in his attic that ages horribly every year while Mullen preserves his boyish looks. He calls this hideous image "Bono." Secondly, never get into a fight with Mullen because he's always got back up. "He might not necessarily thump you," Bono explains, "but you never know who's around the corner."

Bono and Larry Mullen Jr. act as pallbearers at the singer's father's funeral, 2003.

"I'M BIPARTISAN. THERE, I'VE COME OUT AND SAID IT." BONO

But right now, the taut, tough beatmaster is observing a cute kitten as it skitters across the bare boards toward him. The tiny ball of fur, no bigger than one of his sneakers, suddenly lunges and the fearless drummer shrieks like a girl. "I hate cats," he shudders, pathetically attempting to regain his composure. "I had a terrible experience with one as a child."

By way of a distraction, Mullen rhapsodizes about the bands that U2 cut their teeth with on the London club circuit.

"You listen to some of the records now and they're still brilliant," he enthuses. "Echo and the Bunnymen and Teardrop Explodes' first albums. Great songs. They really stand up. They had a real confidence and presence about them. I've been listening to all that stuff again recently."

Bono and wife, Alison Stewart, 2003

Could the reemergence of the Edge's classic guitar sound, the reappearance of Steve Lillywhite (producer of U2's debut) and Mullen's reacquaintance with the School of 1979 suggest a midlife crisis? A 40 odd year old yearning for long-gone youth?

"Possibly," says Clayton, who has in recent years taken on the clean and serene demeanor of a plain-clothes Buddhist monk. Despite his untold millions and a bulging property portfolio, he appears to have renounced the material world and wears the comfortable sandals and apologetic expression of a man who has seen the error of his drug-gobbling, supermodel-bothering ways. "We had a lot of fun back then," he smiles wryly.

Ask Bono when was the last time U2 went out together and let their hair down, and he'll preface his answer with "Well, of course Adam doesn't drink . . ." before adding, "but we've had some pretty wild games of Scrabble." Then, "Sometimes we'll still pour →

The Elevation tour, Dublin, 2001

Clockwise from top: POR/Rex USA; Theo Wargo/Wireimage.com; Richard Hartog/Abaca Press

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petrol on our heads, light a match and see what happens."

But, in their well-loved jeans and favorite Ts, U2 has never been about outlandish decadence or conspicuous consumption. It's well known that they own large chunks of Ireland, with enviable slices of French and American real estate on the side. But their business affairs, suavely conducted by their manager and "fifth member" Paul McGuinness, have always been the very model of gentlemanly discretion.

Bono might share a sandwich with Bill Gates and have the Clintons around for dinner, but, given the choice, he would still take them to the local pub in his battered Volvo. He is certainly one of the few stars with the Pope's home number on speed-dial, but what did Il Papa get as a cathedral-warming gift? Some cheap sunglasses and a stubbly kiss.

"SOMETIMES WE'LL STILL POUR PETROL ON OUR HEADS AND LIGHT A MATCH." BONO

While U2 have outwardly succumbed to the more vulgar rock-star trappings — Elevation Air, a 40-seater 727 jumbo jet with staff pilots and stewardesses was the chosen means of transport for their last tour — such investments often make sound financial sense.

They've bought the houses, the Harleys, the holiday *haciendas* and, in Bono's case, a couple of sheep, but they've all learned, often the hard way, that "a house doesn't make a home."

Hence, we find ourselves once again gawking like teenagers at Paul Allen's floating gin-palace — the 413-foot Octopus turns out to be one of three such yachts he owns — which is virtually obscuring the perfect sunset behind it.

Bono has allowed himself a beer and is attacking the house salad with commendable zeal. He orders carpaccio of squid with French fries and mayonnaise ("God's own fish 'n' chips") for his guests and selects several bottles of the robust local rosé with the air of a regular who won't be needing the wine list, *merci*.

Over dinner, Bono frets about tomorrow's shoot for the album cover. He wants to portray the band as friends who have made it into their 40s and accept each other, faults and all. Perhaps, Bono suggests, a picture of U2 sitting around a café table drinking coffee and talking? Or maybe, he teases, just a shot of a muscular drummer diving naked into the ocean.

EVERYBODY LOVES BONO!

Presidents *and* pontiffs adore the U2 front man

NELSON MANDELA
"Yes, that's *four* Guinnesses!"

THE POPE
"I'll pray for you." "Thanks, Bono!"

BILL CLINTON
"Do rock bands have interns?"

GEORGE W. BUSH
Only one of these people can count to two.

This idea seems remarkably popular with all but one person here tonight.

"*Feck* that," says Mullen.

Before Bono slips his feet into his thick-soled sandals, preparing for the short walk home, his features take on a beatific glow. "How *do* you dismantle an atomic bomb?" he asks. In the absence of any sensible reply, he removes his sunglasses and lowers his voice to a whisper. "With love," he says.

"And a lot of care," Mullen adds.

As always, it takes Bono an age to leave. An incurable socializer, he drifts around the restaurant, gossiping with the early diners and trafficking wine to the outside tables. "So what have you been doing with yourself?" asks an attractive older lady and Bono, international power-broker, suddenly becomes a tongue-tied schoolboy. "Well, we've finished our new record," he stammers, "which is . . . really good. We've just got to get the songs in order and it's kind of finished."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

THESE WORDS RING hollow the following evening when, at the end of a publicity photo shoot, the Edge goes to his boom box to check the running order he's been tweaking all day, only to discover the disc is missing. The fact slowly dawns that U2's album has been stolen.

As there are only a handful of complete copies in existence, the potential for bootlegging is immense. The French police are called, and the U2 organization goes into smoothly efficient overdrive. Two years' work and millions of dollars are at stake. People in high places are contacted. The Edge is beside himself with worry; Bono is bullish; Mullen is very quiet, and Clayton retains a Zen-like calm. As they weren't planning to release the album until November, four months away, they need a solution — and fast.

"U2 Still Haven't Found What They're Looking For" crow the newspapers the next morning as the story breaks. But the band has a plan. Should even one track appear on the Internet they will release the whole album through iTunes immediately. Other than that, they'll just have to wait.

"Well, that's our holidays fucked," says Bono bravely and casts his mind back 24 hours to less stressful times.

He was sitting in a bar by the beach, staring at the sea wondering what the four members of U2 will be doing at age 80.

"God willing, we'll be in the snug of a Dublin pub," he says smiling, regarding his band mates with fatherly affection. "Larry will still look 25 years old, Adam will be sitting cross-legged having found nirvana and the Edge will be sipping a pint of Guinness, taking it all in, saying, 'I've just had a thought. . . .' "

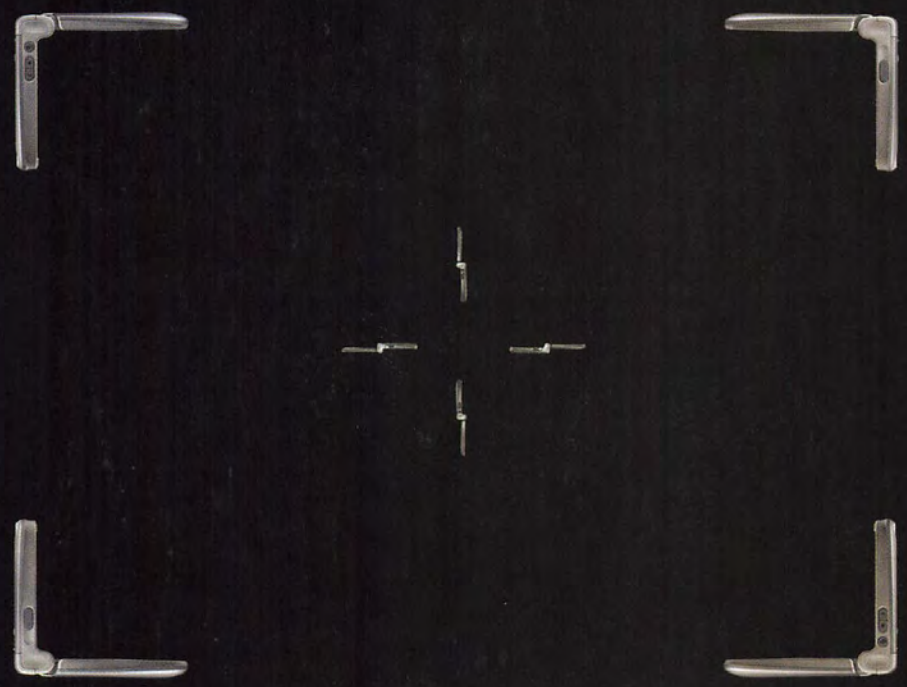
And Bono?

"It's a fairly safe bet," says Mullen, squinting into the middle distance, "that Bono will probably still be talking." [BLENDER]

FOR MORE U2 TURN TO PAGE 122 →

From top: Richard Young/Rex USA; Reuters/Corbis; Kevin Mazur/Wireimage.com; Reuters/Corbis

Sony Ericsson



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"IT COULD BE ABOUT GOD..."

U2 provide an exclusive rundown of their magnificent new album, *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb.* BY ADRIAN DEEVOY

U2 recording in Air Studios, London, October 2003.

1 "VERTIGO"

First single, bursting with energy

THE EDGE: "Rock & roll has to have that feeling of urgency and I think this has it."

ADAM CLAYTON: "To me it sounds like it could have been done in 1980 and yet it has that contemporary feel as well."

2 "CRUMBS FROM YOUR TABLE"

A drunk classic!

THE EDGE: "It's actually the only song we've ever successfully worked on when we were completely pissed. Totally drunk. Around the kitchen table with acoustic guitars, slurring away."

3 "SOMETIMES YOU CAN'T MAKE IT ON YOUR OWN"

Bono's heart-wrenching love letter to his dad

CLAYTON: "Bono's grieving for his father. It's such a personal song."

THE EDGE: "We actually sang it at his dad's funeral."

4 "CITY OF BLINDING LIGHTS"

Vintage U2: rich imagery, driving guitars

CLAYTON: "This began as an outtake from *Pop*. To us, it was an homage to Scott Walker. The working title was 'Scott Walker'."

5 "ALL BECAUSE OF YOU"

The Edge re-finds the Riff

CLAYTON: "It could be about God, it could be about your father or your friends. Or the audience."

THE EDGE: "Life would be so much simpler if you didn't know what you knew. I think it's about that, in a way."

6 "LOVE AND PEACE"

Like Led Zeppelin playing rockabilly — in a dumpster

CLAYTON: "The scary bass sound you hear on that isn't actually me. It's name is Brian."

THE EDGE: "The solo comes from a very deep and dark place. You wouldn't want to go there."

7 "MAN AND A WOMAN"

U2 go motown, in a smoochy kinda way

BONO: "I always thought if we could get this one right, it would make you feel like you were in New York City sitting on the stoop, hearing it coming out of taxi cabs on a hot summer evening."

CLAYTON: "The ladies will love it."

8 "MIRACLE DRUG"

Wondrous swooping tune, great story

BONO: "We all went to the same school and just as we were leaving, a fellow called Christopher Nolan arrived. He had been deprived of oxygen for two hours when he was born, so he was paraplegic. But his mother believed he could understand what was going on and used to teach him at home. Eventually, they discovered a drug that allowed him to move one muscle in his neck. So they attached this unicorn device to his forehead and he learned to type. And out of him came all these poems that he'd been storing up in his head. Then he put out a collection called *Dam-Burst of Dreams*, which won a load of awards and he went off to university and became a genius. All because of a mother's love and a medical breakthrough."

9 "ONE STEP CLOSER TO KNOWING"

Sparse splinters of sound and a lonesome search for faith

BONO: "I was talking to Noel Gallagher [from Oasis] about my dad, who lost his faith toward the end of his life. And Noel asked, 'Does he believe in God?' And I said, 'I don't think he knows.' So Noel went, 'Well, he's one step closer to knowing now.' And I thought, 'I'm going to write that song . . . .' "

10 "ORIGINAL OF THE SPECIES"

Air-punching chant-along

THE EDGE: "I had to rewrite the chords for the verse and it was like killing your children because I loved those chords."

11 "YAWEH"

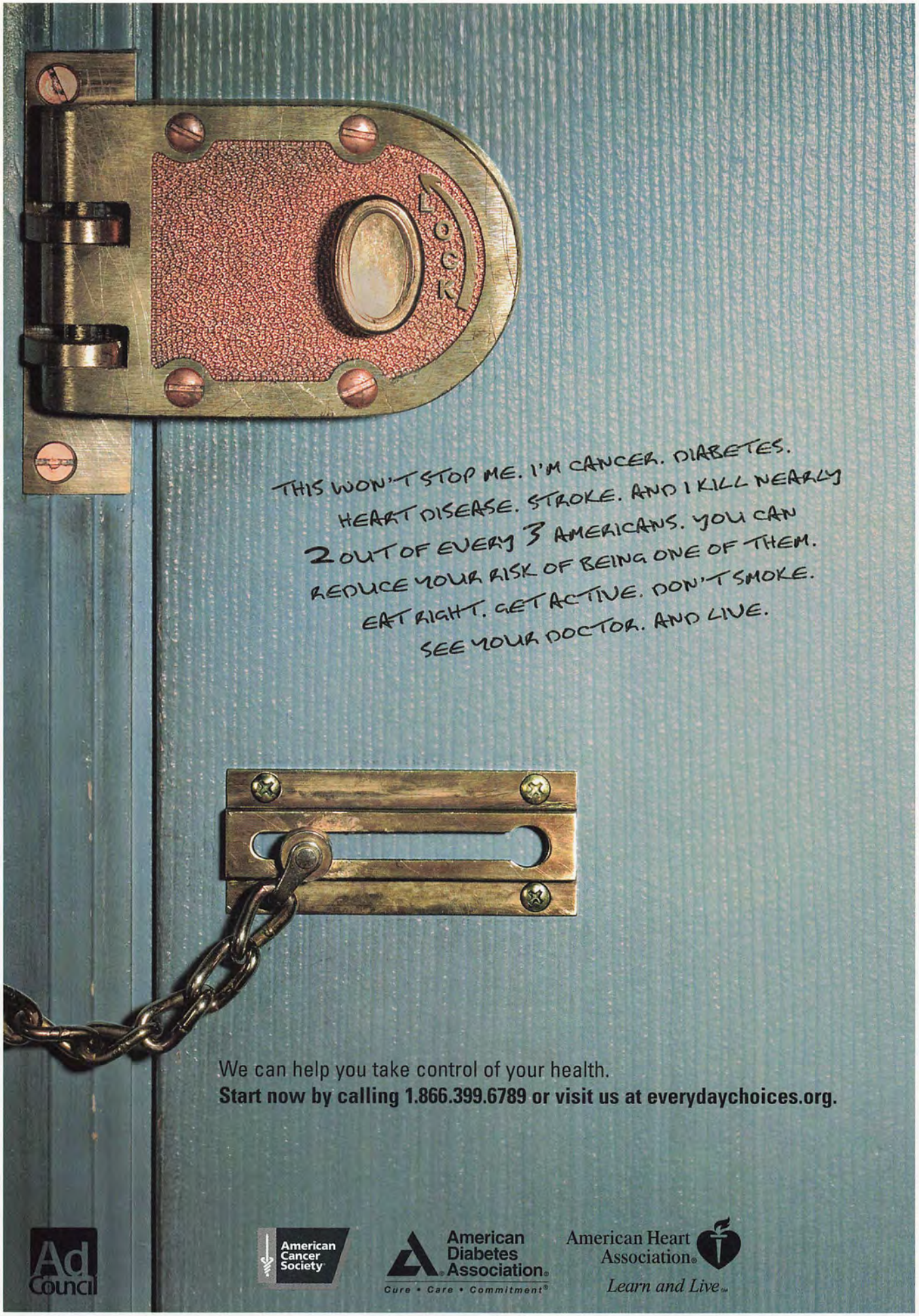
Modern hymn with a broadband connection to God

BONO: "This is an usual one. Daniel Lanois played the mandolin on that song and it just touches it."

THE EDGE: "The real key was the bass part because it underpins the whole song. It's magnificent."

CLAYTON: "Really, it was nothing." [BLENDER]

From top: Anja Graber; Perou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THIS WON'T STOP ME. I'M CANCER. DIABETES.
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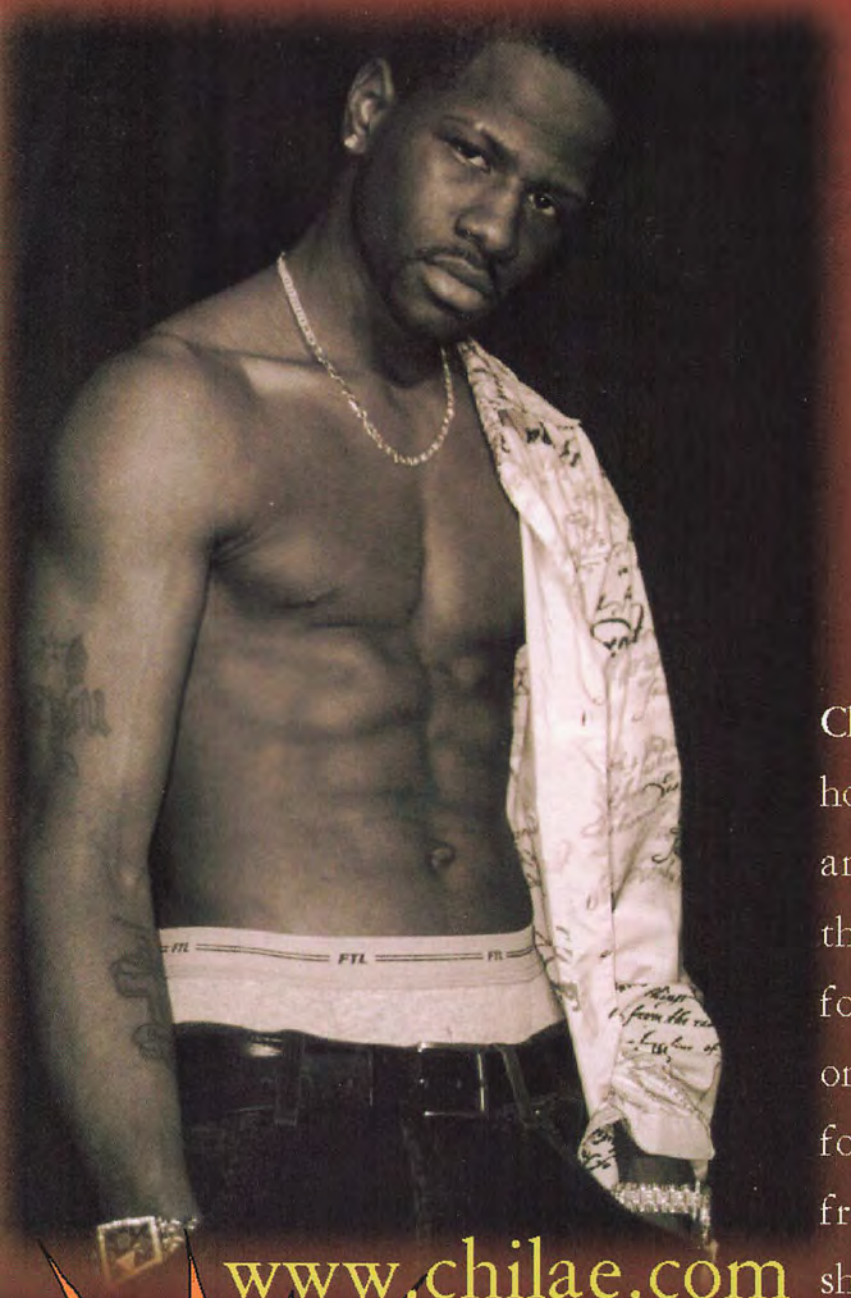
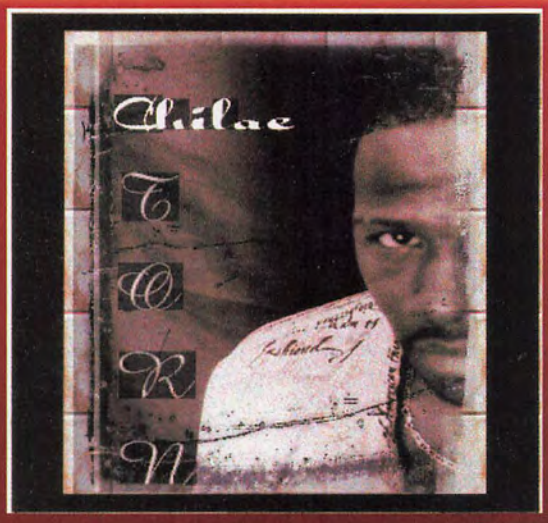
Chilae!

Debut CD "TORN"





Chilae,' pronounced (Chill-lay) is R&B's hottest rising star! His smooth singing and mesmerizing dance moves are off the chain! Watch for the music video for his single "U Can't Handle It" to air on BET (Get It First, Get It Fast). Look for this HOT single and many others from his debut album"TORN" to hit the shelves this fall.

Don't wait until then! Log on to www.chilae.com to see what he's all about and to listen to clips of his music NOW!

www.chilae.com

HOT PRODUCT

Foundation Records Inc.

126
VANESSA CARLTON
The potty-mouthed piano girl returns with a second album. Does she still have it?
★★★

152
KORN
Before limpbizkit barked about nookie, this Cali group broke the rap-rock revival. Their hits set, reviewed.
★★★

168
USHER
Screaming girls, 20 costume changes, a monster infidelity ballad – 2004's biggest pop star: live!
★★★★★

THE GUIDE

THEY MAKE 'EM. WE REVIEW 'EM

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The Beatles

Which are their best albums and which are a load of googoogajoob? p164

Sheryl Nields (Vanessa Carlton); Will Blochinger/Corbis Outline (Korn); Frank Micelotta (Usher); Pictorial Press (the Beatles)

Almost Grown

Bach-loving beauty enters prime time

VANESSA CARLTON
HARMONIUM

✪✪✪

A&M

IMAGINE A SUN-STREAKED beach in early evening, awash in late-summer afterglow. At the water's edge stands a young woman, her flushed face and salt-kissed hair showing evidence of a swim or a secret tryst. A boy strides into the far corner of the frame. Is he a stranger? The one she's hoping to see?

Somewhere, her parents are sipping pinot grigio; somewhere, a friend is getting into trouble. Music floats on the breeze, the whisper of strings and the soft notes of a piano. The girl starts to sing. Her voice is like any girl's, but perfected. She turns away, a tentative decision clouding her eyes. A Trojan condom commercial interrupts. Tune in next time for more.

Vanessa Carlton evokes scenes such as this because her music is so much like the dramas on primetime WB programs. It's easy to compare her second album to the work of predecessors Tori Amos and Fiona Apple, or peer Alicia Keys. Like those ladies, she's an ivory tickler with one foot in higher art (she was once a serious *danseuse*) and one in classic pop-rock (she's buds with '50s and '60s hitmaker Carole King), writing songs that are both confessional and willfully poetic. But more useful correlations come from the worlds of *Everwood* and *Smallville*.

HER SONGS ARE LIKE WB MINI-DRAMAS.

Carlton has a gift for creating vignettes. The vengeful "C'est La Vie" or the giddy lovers' holiday "San Francisco" focus on narrative more than mood or virtuosity, making space for a listener to find herself (maybe even himself) among well-wrought characters. But her mini-dramas are *so* beautifully structured, *so* artfully played out, that they don't leave room for what makes pop music different from, say, TV — the beautiful disorder of individuality.

Take "White Houses," the record's inspired first single. Beginning like a children's song, with Carlton playing rudimentary lines and singing in a nursery-rhyme cadence, this tale gets a kick from a bright, un-girly 4/4 beat and a dynamic build-up that feels a lot like the teenage summer sex described in the lyrics. Little details — the familiar image of five friends sharing a single house, the impudence that meets longing in Carlton's voice when she sings, "Maybe you'll remember me" — lend immediacy. Yet the song's incredibly tight structure makes it feel slightly generic, populated by actors instead of real kids. Precision makes "White Houses" more accessible. But it also makes the story feel impersonal, like an invention rather than an experience.

In fact, *Harmonium* isn't all Carlton's; it's a collaboration between the singer and her sweetheart, Stephan Jenkins, who has been creating similarly airtight, clever pop with his band, Third Eye Blind, since the post-grunge '90s. The 40-year-old Jenkins might be offended by the idea that he's playing Svengali to the 24 year old, but there's no doubt that, Henry Higgins-style, he has taught her a few things about articulation.

The interplay between Carlton's sugar and Jenkins's old salt dominates the album: Punchy drumming counters lush strings on "Private Radio"; nightclubbing bass and keyboards break through ethereal backing vocals on "C'est La Vie"; literal screams puncture the grand climax of "She Floats." It's the perfect balance to represent a coming of age.

With help from someone who's been through it all and had time to think about it twice, Carlton has made music for growing-ups that is neither cloying nor pretentious. And just as *Everwood* and *Smallville* sometimes get sneakily serious, Carlton touches on deeper matters as well, like depression and youthful mortality, within her little stories of romance.

Like those hour-long glimpses of teen angst and perfection, *Harmonium* offers casual satisfaction to most, and deep meaning to truly devoted fans. Yet a sneaking sense remains that she can reach deeper. Her music needs more accidents, more desperation or real joy to complement her perfectionism. When she reaches that aspect of her gift, Carlton will succeed beyond prime time.

ANN POWERS

DOWNLOAD THESE: "C'est La Vie," "Annie," "Who's to Say"

Sheryl Nields

Vanessa Carlton: "I call this next one 'Für Elise in Hot Lingerie,' B minor."

Fighting crime ONE THRUST at a time.

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AMERICAN MUSIC CLUB

LOVE SONGS FOR PATRIOTS ✪✪✪✪

MERGE

Cult-adored San Francisco sad-sacks reunite, make more music for drinking alone

American Music Club frontman Mark Eitzel doesn't just sing about depression — he acts out its messy cycles on sprawling ballads. Reunited with his sad-sack buddies after a 10-year hiatus, Eitzel sounds like he's finally emerging from the murk on *Love Songs for Patriots*. Painfully lucid and too smart for self-pity, he chips away at his depressive shtick, as his weary baritone pushes tortured angst into the realm of black comedy. Political anger becomes him: "Ladies and Gentlemen" is a genuinely stirring mock Presidential address, and the jaw-dropping centerpiece, "Patriot's Heart," is the best song ever written about the kind of national pride inspired by the "sweating mirrors" of a gay strip club, surely.

DENNIS LIM

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Patriot's Heart," "Ladies and Gentlemen," "Home"

THE SCORE »

✪✪✪✪✪ EXCELLENT. A MUST-HAVE

✪✪✪✪ GREAT. CHECK IT OUT

✪✪✪ GOOD IN ITS GENRE

✪✪ JUST OK

✪ WEAK

ANTHONY B

UNTOUCHABLE ✪✪✪

TOGETHERNESS/PYRAMID

Rastafarian reggae star broaches the sacred and the secular

Anthony B has a rumbling, authoritative voice best described as Biblical: Daringly un-dulcet and sharply articulated, it's tough to tune out — and thus ideal for the social-commentary tracks on which he's built his career. But on his 14th album, *Untouchable*,

American Music Club bemoan straitjacket shortage.

Anthony B suggests revolutionaries need love, too. "Soldiers" is a rousing anti-war anthem, while "Safe Sex" borders on sounding like a PSA. But the album also serves up jovial crossover tunes about ladies who "knock me out, just like Muhammad Ali" — they're sometimes catchy, sometimes utterly mismatched to Anthony's sober vocal style. Listening to him swap bedroom stories with Snoop Dogg ("What Would U Do?") is like listening to the prophet Isaiah discuss a trip to Hooter's. Girls and gravitas don't always mix.

BAZ DREISINGER

DOWNLOAD THESE: "All the Way," "Jah Is There for I," "Soldiers"

DEVENDRA BANHART

NINO ROJO ✪✪✪

YOUNG GOD

Catchy, disarming folk pop from formerly homeless innocent

Imagine a cross between Jonathan Richman and Elmo with most of the annoying bits removed, and that's Banhart. Sure, the 23-year-old singer-guitarist likes to sing about dancing spiders and little lost birdies with a quivering, Tiny Tim vibrato. It helps that his idiosyncratic fingerpicking and the occasional splash of bass and horns keep things from falling into solo-acoustic monotony. But it's Banhart's gift for melody that ultimately carries the day, littering the album with slyly entrancing tunes that recall the pleasure of old campfire songs. It's enough to cure even a hardened cynic.

J.D. CONSIDINE

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Noah," "Electric Heart"

Royal Pains

The '80s revival stops here

DURAN DURAN

ASTRONAUT ✪✪

EPIC

OF ALL THE bands to swagger into arenas and elite beach resorts in the '80s, none were more '80s than Duran Duran. The British quintet fused chest-puffing pretension and glossy narcissism, and were brash enough to funnel those qualities into extravagantly vivid pop. They were a boy band with brains, albeit never as many as they thought.

And the truth is, they haven't made a great album for 20 years. As self-assurance curdled into hubris, they veered between the disastrous (1995's cover-version farrago, *Thank You*) and the drab (everything else). Despite the reformation of the original lineup, and a triumphant comeback tour, *Astronaut* is no more inspiring.

The default setting is funk-pop bombast augmented by horribly dated electronica. The listener is regularly instructed to "believe" and "reach up," and the *Queer Eye*-endorsed "(Reach Up for the) Sunrise" is inane enough to be a jingle for orange juice. The spirited avalanche of romantic clichés on "Nice" might justify a video on a yacht, but what's the band that once dealt in adjectives like "wild" and "notorious" doing with one as limp as "nice"?

It's unclear whether Duran want to embrace their kitsch past or transcend it. Couplets such as "Grooving now to X-Ray Spex/ Something tells me you're the alien sex" are so awful they attain a perverse magnificence, but Simon LeBon never sounds like he knows it's a joke. The panache that once redeemed his most idiotic lines has faded to gray. Ah well, the videos might be good.

DORIAN LYNSKEY

DOWNLOAD THIS: "What Happens Tomorrow"

SIMON LeBON'S CURRENT LISTENING:

SCISSOR SISTERS SCISSOR SISTERS *POLYDOR*

KELIS TASTY *ARISTA*

Duran Duran: And that's their *elevator.*

Beans: "I get MTV on these!"

Blondie: combined age, 362.

BEANS

SHOCK CITY MAVERICK ✪✪✪✪

WARP

Lowbrow humor from a highbrow rap maverick

With his creaky, avant-garde beats and hyper-literate rhymes, New York oddball Beans shares little in common with most of his rap peers. But his excellent second album, *Shock City Maverick*, focuses specifically on run-of-the-mill hip-hop subjects, like the opposite sex — "Never let a woman plant a flag on my testicles," he brags on "Papercut" — slaying rivals and taking it to that proverbial next level ("I'll Melt You"). "Walk a tightrope wearing two left shoes," he boasts on "Blind Driver," while the aptly named chest-thumper "Death By Sophistication" imagines "crowds screaming like a dick caught in a zipper." Beans's themes may be everyday, but thankfully his wit isn't.

HUA HSU

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Down By Law," "Papercut"

BLOC PARTY

BLOC PARTY ✪✪✪

DIM MAK

Franz Ferdinand-approved multi-ethnic hipsters shake their asses, feel dirty about it

What is it about sex that punks find so scary? From Joy Division to blink-182, nothing can inspire fits of existential dread so much as a booty call — that obliteration of the body's borders and the icky closeness of someone else. Like Franz Ferdinand (who helped break Bloc Party after hearing a demo), these London post-punks spice up jumpy dance-rock on this EP with a dash of paranoia and libidinal unrest. On the single "Banquet," singer Kele Okereke pulls off a great trick: He sounds both horrified by intimacy and thoroughly sexy, yelping one second, unfurling a falsetto ribbon the next. Still, his hysteria and hipster carnival bark feel affected, and the band often sounds rickety and thin where they'd like to slam and shimmy.

JONAH WEINER

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Banquet," "She's Hearing Voices"

BLONDIE

LIVE BY REQUEST ✪✪✪✪

SANCTUARY

Aped by the Strokes and Franz Ferdinand, NYC's sexiest original punks have sped up with age

OLD, BUT STILL HOT.

Thanks perhaps to Debbie Harry's tinted follicles, Blondie's prowess as a gutsy live band is rarely acknowledged, even though they honed their skills in the punk-legend breeding ground of CBGB's. But 30 years on, Blondie still have it. Recorded in NYC last May for an A&E *Live By Request* broadcast, this set boasts the best-ever live recordings of most of their hits; unsurprisingly, only one new track, "Good Boys," was requested. The songs are bulked-up and spiky — the exuberant "Hanging On the Telephone" is embellished with squalling guitars, "Call Me" gets a rawk-style facelift, and "Heart of Glass" builds to show-stopping, jaw-rattling crescendos. Blondie may be getting old, but they're sure not sounding tired.

APRIL LONG

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Hanging On the Telephone," "Rip Her to Shreds"

I LOVE THIS CD!

GWYNETH PALTROW
ACTRESS IN *PROOF*

PJ HARVEY
UH HUH HER
ISLAND

"I really like the rawness and honesty of her lyrics."

THE BLOOD BROTHERS

CRIMES ✪✪✪

V2

On fourth album, Seattle fivesome soften their spasms, spend hours (or seconds) thinking up song titles

Like some high schoolers, the Blood Brothers work awfully hard at being weird. They apply their ample instrumental chops (which are more like karate chops) to spitting out swerve-on-a-dime mishmashes of pseudo-soul, shrill pop and screamo hysterics. Adding to the chaos, vocalists Jordan Blilie and Johnny Whitney gruffly croon absurd lyrics *and* screech them in falsetto. The result is strangely compelling: "Trash Flavored Trash" could be a Japanese radio hit injected with steroids, while "Love Rhymes With Hideous Car Wreck" builds from a sweetly melodic goth tune into death-metal convulsions. Jaunty but warped, "Live At the Apocalypse Cabaret" earns its name. At this rate, call the Blood Brothers most likely to succeed.

NICK CATUCCI

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Trash Flavored Trash," "Live At the Apocalypse Cabaret"

BOWLING FOR SOUP

A HANGOVER YOU DON'T DESERVE ✪✪✪

JIVE

Texas quartet modify John Lennon's '60s mantra by adding suds

Frantic riffs, roundhouse hooks, and Jaret Reddick's perpetually adolescent whining about scoring chicks and swilling beer have served as Bowling For Soup's airtight blueprint for a decade now. On their fourth album, *A Hangover You Don't Deserve*, there's still plenty of high-speed frat-boy angst ("Next Ex-Girlfriend"), but the band also confront the hangover of life when the party's over. Simultaneously goofy and poignant, Bowling For Soup recall Fountains of Wayne on "Trucker Hat" ("I'll never go out of style on you"), while "1985" winkingly reveals the pathetic nature of those stuck in the past. And they build a viable philosophy out of laddishness: When Reddick sings "All we need is love and beer" on "Shut →

Gamer OR Flamer?

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COMED CENTRA

Previous page, from top: Chris Buck; Richard Haughton. This page, clockwise from top left: Tim Saccenti; Courtesy of Sanctuary Records; Doug Peters/allactiondigital.com/Retna Ltd.

Up and Smile," it's all the truth anyone really needs.

ERIK HIMMELSBACH

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Trucker Hat," "1985," "Shut Up and Smile"

RICHARD BUCKNER

DENTS AND SHELLS ✪✪✪

MERGE

Nomadic songwriters' songwriter cranks the anguish down – just a notch

WAY BUMMED OUT

Richard Buckner, whose home is Nowhere and whose heart is Aching, sounds in theory like a million coffeehouse whiners. Ask the converted, though, and they'll describe a singular performer: Hard living and harder emotions have made his voice raw, and what he does with it cuts deep – his pitch-perfect melisma sounds like exhaustion, and he constructs run-on sentences as if the words are so heavy he can carry only a few at a time. His sixth album is, by Buckner's standards, gentle: The anguished yelp of his debut, *Bloomed*, is muted – even *tender* – on tracks like "Straight" and "Fuse." Elsewhere it's more tales of motels and missed connections, spun in wildly elliptical lyrics, accompanied by minimalist organ and pedal steel.

JOHN DEFORE

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Charmers," "A Chance Counsel"

John Cale: We *told* you to wear a sweater.

JOHN CALE

HOBOSAPIENS ✪✪✪

OR

Catchy, mysterious art-pop from ever-curious Velvet Underground co-founder

John Cale is one of rock's great dilettantes: After a solid education in classical music, he took up the avant-garde with Lou Reed, then produced the Stooges and Patti Smith while perfecting his own dour cabaret style. And he remains obsessively curious about new forms, recruiting Nick Franglen of the electronic duo Lemon Jelly for his first album of new songs since 1996. Setting a series of daydreams and oblique musings to loopy, atmospheric grooves, he coolly slips from surprisingly hummable pop ("Things," an inscrutable catalogue of "things you do in Denver when you're dead") to dense, brooding meditations ("Magritte," "Twilight Zone"). He is clearly invigorated by the tensions between pretty and ugly, simplicity and chaos. Which are complementary forces, as always, for Cale.

BEN SISARIO

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Things," "Bicycle"

NEKO CASE

THE TIGERS HAVE SPOKEN ✪✪✪

ANTI-/EPITAPH

Big-voiced country-noir femme fatale thaws out with exuberant live set

If Neko Case's 2002 spellbinder *Blacklisted* was as chilly and spooky as the night wind in a Pacific Northwest forest, this new live collection radiates the cozy good cheer of a killer amateur-night set. Dropping her femme fatale act, the country-noir siren (and occasional member of New Pornographers) settles into a relaxed dive-bar groove with up-for-anything backing band the Sadies. The few originals – especially the wistful PETA-friendly title track – hold steady against a personal jukebox of classics, some more obvious (Loretta Lynn's "Rated X") than others (the Shangri-Las' "Train From Kansas City"). Best of all,

Alone, Together

Popular punks say, "It's OK to be sad"

GOOD CHARLOTTE

THE CHRONICLES OF LIFE AND DEATH ✪✪✪

EPIC

IF HIS BAND dries up, Joel Madden can move into the motivational-speaker circuit. In 2002, Good Charlotte broke big whining about celebrities on the surprise hit "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous" – but they broke real big with "Hold On," a suicide-prevention jam whose heart-string-tugging video worked like a PSA, and forged them a distinct identity: Care Bears in eyeliner. Three million people noticed, including Miss Nice herself, Hilary Duff, who is good pals (and more, it's rumored) with Madden.

From the ponderous title to a marketing ploy in which two versions of the CD feature different closing songs, Madden clearly covets a loftier perch than the Warped Tour main stage. His muse is Everykid suffering alone in a darkened bedroom, a figure that haunts the anthemic breakup lament "Walk Away (Maybe)," the anthemic breakup lament "Ghost of You," the anthemic breakup lament "Predictable," and the anthemic suicide lament "S.O.S." Thankfully the band, including Joel's guitarist-bro Benji, embrace their superstar status by cranking out big-money hooks – airliner huge and bittersweet – that contribute an illusion of profundity.

For Joel, it's clear that life means alienation: The word "alone" appears five times here, "afraid" six times, and "no one" ("there's no one there but me," "no one really cares" etc.) nine times. His view of human bonds can be cynical or optimistic, but either way, his message is ultimately reassuring: You're not alone in feeling alone. Welcome to tonight's Very Special Episode of pop-punk.

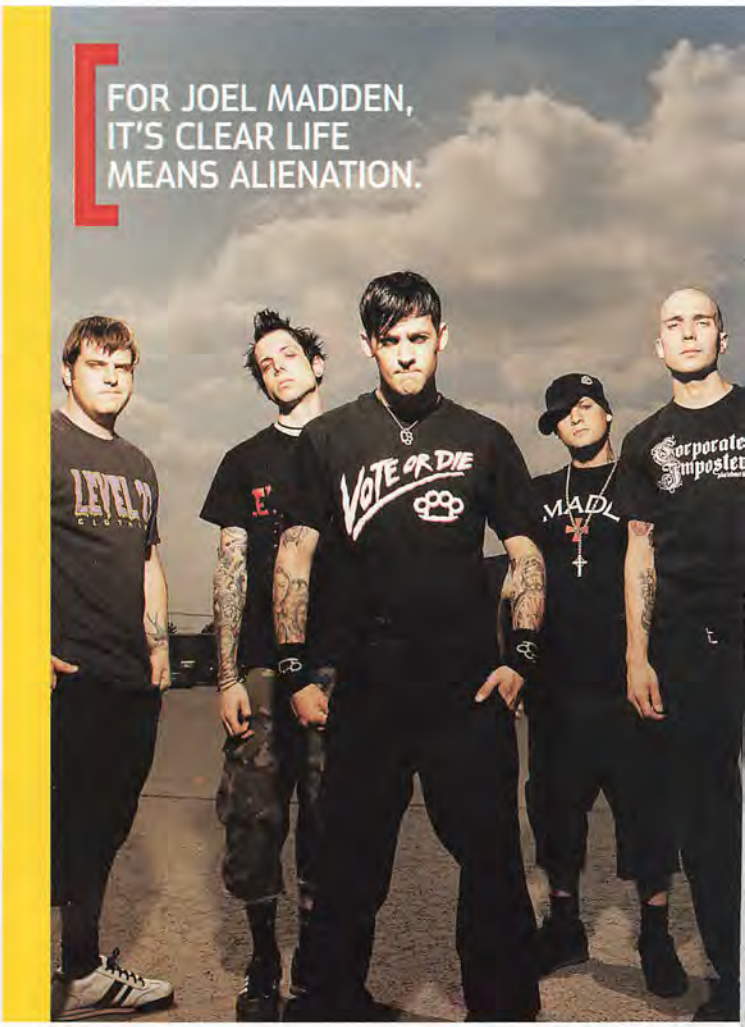
JONAH WEINER

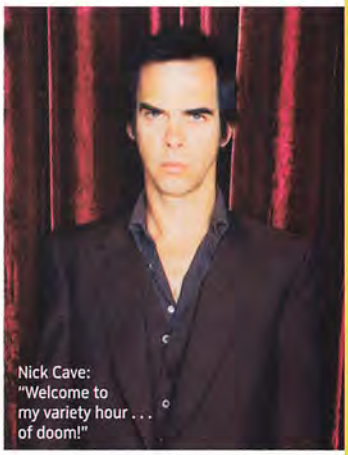
DOWNLOAD THESE: "Predictable," "Walk Away (Maybe)"

JOEL MADDEN'S CURRENT LISTENING:

MORRISSEY
YOU ARE THE QUARRY *ATTACK/SANCTUARY*

HAZEN STREET
HAZEN STREET *D.C. FLAG*





Nick Cave: "Welcome to my variety hour . . . of doom!"

Case is still devising new uses for mighty four-alarm pipes that can envelop you like a lover's embrace one moment, and an anaconda's death grip the next.

DENNIS LIM

DOWNLOAD THESE: "The Tigers Have Spoken," "Favorite"

NICK CAVE & THE BAD SEEDS

ABATTOIR BLUES/THE LYRE OF ORPHEUS ✪✪✪✪

ANTI-/EPITAPH

Australian prophet of gloom gets some fire back in his belly

It turns out that "Babe, I'm On Fire," the blast of funky abandon that climaxed Nick Cave's otherwise underwhelming previous album, *Nocturama*, was a harbinger. Far from slipping comfortably into middle age, Cave has loudly reacquainted himself with fire, brimstone and the kind of boiling, roiling blues the Bad Seeds haven't cooked up in years. Often backed by a gospel choir, Cave's words come in wild, Biblical floods: Greek myths, puzzling parables, black, black comedy and a sense that apocalypse is about to rain down. *Abattoir Blues* is the fiercer and more frenzied of the two discs. When, on the title cut, Cave growls, "I woke up this morning with a frappuccino in my hands," he manages to make even refreshing caffeinated beverages sound terrifying.

DORIAN LYNSKEY

DOWNLOAD THESE: "There She Goes, My Beautiful World,""Hiding All Away," "O Children"

CHEVELLE

THIS KIND OF THINKING COULD DO US IN

✪✪✪

EPIC

Trio of Chicago brothers rock like Hanson in hell

No matter how bad you've got it, the brothers grim in Chevelle are worse off. Pete Loeffler's voice trembles like a drunk's hands, and he sounds out of breath, as if he's doing wind sprints in the studio. His siblings Sam (drums) and Joe (bass) help sand down Tool's sharp edges, resulting in pleading, minor-key metal that emotes as if the family dog has just died. On the follow-up to 2002's platinum *Wonder What's Next*, Chevelle's tunes are as tight as a clenched fist, especially on panoramic rockers like "The Clincher," where serpentine riffs encircle a no-frills rhythm section heavy enough to chip concrete. But by album's end, all the lamenting becomes exasperating, like being stuck in traffic behind a funeral procession.

JASON BRACELIN

DOWNLOAD THESE: "The Clincher," "Get Some"

Chicks On Speed *hate* being Siamese triplets.

ASTONISHING FACT!

BEANS has collected comic books since he was 7. At one point, he had almost 4,000!

CHICKS ON SPEED

99¢ ✪✪✪

CHICKS ON SPEED

Euro-trash girls sell out — but not without a fight

"Exploit yourself . . . before it's done to you," the battle cry of art-gal collective Chicks On Speed, sums up the bent of their third release. They've turned up the goofy dance-pop and slicked up their scratchy, homemade aesthetic with silly singles like the electro-pride "We Don't Play Guitars," a playful remake of Tom Tom Club's 1981 hit "Wordy Rappinghood," and guest appearances by Peaches, goddess of porno-techno, and eclectic French DJ Miss Kittin. At 50 percent celebration and 50 percent work, it's a new paradigm for the Chicks, though they still slice through the froth with slogans like "Luxury is the income tax of vanity!" — whatever that means. Picture a protest of the World Trade Organization led by Bananarama.

JAMES HANNAHAM

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Wordy Rappinghood," "Universal Pussy"

I LOVE THIS CD!

SETH GREEN
ACTOR IN *WITHOUT A PADDLE*

MODEST MOUSE
THE MOON AND ANTARCTICA
EPIC

"Every track sounds like it's by a different band, and that's cool."

LEONARD COHEN

DEAR HEATHER ✪✪✪✪

COLUMBIA

Canadian maestro is one of the few rock writers who can genuinely claim to be a "poet"

Soon after Bob Dylan showed in the '60s how lyrics could go wherever a songwriter liked, Leonard Cohen mastered a melancholy sensuality juiced by the techniques of poetry. *Dear Heather* is top Cohen: It begins by addressing women ("Because Of") in a ripe, humane baritone, then gets dramatically literary ("The Letters"), looks at 9/11 ("On that Day"), and dovetails back toward sex with the subtle yet explosive title piece. Its lyrics read: "Dear Heather/Please walk by me again/With a drink in your hand/And your legs all white/From the winter." With a live version of the Grand Ole ➔

Previous page, from top: Corrine Day; Lego. This page, clockwise from top left: Polly Borland; Courtesy of Chicks On Speed Record; Gina James/graylock.com/Retna Ltd.

"Hey, let's put on the Donnas."

Opry standard "Tennessee Waltz," Cohen ends on a strange Nashville cloud. These are all country songs, you could say — for wine bars.

JAMES HUNTER

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Dear Heather," "The Letters," "There for You"

KIMYA DAWSON

HIDDEN VAGENDA ✪✪✪✪

K RECORDS

Sad-eyed ex-Moldy Peach abandons dirty limericks on terrific solo record

Like Ani DiFranco, the spiritual godmother of anti-folk, Kimya Dawson writes prolific bare-bones diary stories high on girl power and social commentary. And on her fourth album in three years, the former Moldy Peach continues to blossom, evolving beyond her old group's naughty-nursery-rhyme bedroom recordings. Though still stripped-down, "Fire" and "Angels and Seagulls" benefit from fuller band arrangements. Death haunts these mostly acoustic tunes, but Dawson's unpolished voice enlivens the moving, sometimes funny odes to dead grandmas ("Lullaby for the Taken") and Anthrax's *Persistence of Time* ("Viva La Persistence"). Now in her 30s, Dawson tunefully balances girlish zeal with womanly maturity. No longer will she need turd jokes to get our attention.

TIM GRIERSON

DOWNLOAD THESE: "It's Been Raining," "Angels and Seagulls," "Fire"

DE LA SOUL

THE GRIND DATE ✪✪✪

SANCTUARY URBAN/AOI

With an inspired new album, De La Soul cover all tenses

"We are the past, we are the present, we are the future," De La Soul declare on their seventh album in 15 years. Former poster children for the cerebral-yet-colorful Native Tongues movement of the pre-gangsta '90s, Dave, Pos and Mase have the past

Dogs Die In Hot Cars: Body odor has become a problem.

covered. Here, their hip-hop nostalgia tracks feature thickly layered samples, labored (sometimes belabored) lyrics about the good old-school days, and cameos from Public Enemy's Flavor Flav, who adds his high-voltage bark. Sputtering sound effects and choppy rhyme schemes lend other tracks an ingeniously futuristic feel. As for the present, dulcet R&B hooks ("It's Like That," "Much More") are spoonfuls of sugar that make De La catchy enough for a new generation of fans.

BAZ DREISINGER

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Shopping Bags," "It's Like That," "Come on Down"

DOGS DIE IN HOT CARS

PLEASE DESCRIBE YOURSELF ✪✪✪

V2

A soaring debut from madcap Scots with the worst band name ever

Half of a touted Scottish musical renaissance — along with Franz Ferdinand — Dogs Die In Hot Cars redeem perhaps the worst band name in rock history with *Please Describe Yourself*, a debut of wit, invention and bracing oddness. The Dogs deal in grand, slightly cracked emotion straining to burst out of dinky garage-band arrangements. A Zappa-load of accordions, fiddles and electronic squiggles complete the impression of a music-therapy class for special-ed kids. They also call to mind R.E.M.'s impenetrable period, because you're never sure what singer Craig McIntosh is on about — a typical lyric ponders "What is the difference between iron and zinc?" At least they dropped their original name: the even worse Robert Plant In Poo Poo Land.

ANDREW HARRISON

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Godhopping," "I Love You 'Cause I Have To," "Somewhat Off the Way"

THE DONNAS

GOLD MEDAL ✪✪✪✪

ATLANTIC

California girl rockers pogo us into the valley of good manners

The Donnas, the tomboy heiresses to the kingdoms of Kiss and the Ramones, are less interested in guy-bashing than in rooting out bad behavior of all stripes. And here, their frustration with scheming girlfriends and negligent (or, worse, nonexistent) boyfriends boils over into a cathartic froth. Guitarist Allison Robertson's phrases have a rough, spiky elegance — they are pure glamour, only with its fur brushed the wrong way. Brett Anderson has a nervy growl, but even her most acidic accusations ("Not a boy, not yet a man/You've never even done time in a van") just rephrase one eminently reasonable question: Why is it so hard to act like a grown-up, regardless of which pronoun your sex goes by?

STEPHANIE ZACHAREK

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Gold Medal," "I Don't Want to Know (If You Don't Want Me)"

I LOVE THIS CD!

ALYSSA MILANO
ACTRESS ON *CHARMED*

50 CENT
GET RICH OR DIE TRYIN' *SHADY/AFTERMATH/INTERSCOPE*

"I am a huge fan. His voice and style are unique. He knows he's sexy, and he uses that."

THE EXPLOSION

BLACK TAPE ✪✪✪

VIRGIN

Bighearted Boston punks have a blast on major-label debut

Having spent five years plugging away in indieland, Boston livewires the Explosion sound thrilled to be making major-label bucks now. That doesn't mean they're through denouncing sellouts or seething with quasi-political rage, though — after all, they're still punks. But rants "No Revolution" and "Atrocity" smile through gritted teeth, while "We All Fall Down" acknowledges that selling out is what's gotten them this far in the first place. Singer Matt Hock can snarl when he wants to, but deep down he's a big softie who looks forward to the future, worries about his mom, cheers up his girl when she's having a bad day and, best of all, loves a good hook. Now *that's* punk rock.

JOSH EELLS

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Here I Am," "Mothers Cry"

FLOGGING MOLLY

WITHIN A MILE OF HOME ✪✪

SIDEONEDUMMY

Ireland goes punk — again — but jackhammer jigs are no longer novel

On their third album, this L.A. septet is still trying to find a comfortable perch in the narrow territory between the Pogues' Irish folk-punk and Dropkick Murphys' Irish punk-folk. Dublin-bred singer Dave King and his cohorts lash tunes like "Tobacco Island" at Murphys-like velocity, making those Boston shout-along punks seem comparatively graceful. George Schwindt's drumming is muscular and precise, but his hardcore gallop overpowers the traditional instruments and strains the melodies. The Mollys are most ➔

From top: Katrina Dickson; Perou; Sara De Boer/Retna Ltd.

8 ROOMMATES. 1 HOUSE.
WHAT'S THAT FLOATING IN THE HOT TUB?
Dude'z Health
COMEDY CENTRAL
DRAWN TOGETHER
TV'S FIRST ANIMATED REALITY SHOW
WEDS 10:30P|9:30C
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persuasive at their most Poguesy, when alt-country queen Lucinda Williams duets on "Factory Girls," a working-class reverie that's merely a bit too fast. Flogging Molly may be only one-seventh Irish, but it's better suited to laments than harangues.

MARK JENKINS

DOWNLOAD THIS: "Factory Girls"

NASIO FONTAINE

LIVING IN THE POSITIVE ✪✪✪

RAS/ SANCTUARY

Roots reggae star takes some deep hits from the Marley bong

There's a school of fans for whom all of reggae is a mere footnote to Bob Marley. Nasio Fontaine is their dream come true. This sweet-sounding singer from the island of Dominica has Marley's recipe down pat: prominent, precise bass lines, honeyed backup vocals, copious references to Mount Zion's herbal fix and a raspy yet melodic delivery. *Living In the Positive*, Fontaine's first U.S. release, is undeniably soothing and meticulously orchestrated, complete with vigorous horns and harmonica hints. Some songs ("African Spirit") border on monotony, but others ("Riding On") redeem them: Fontaine's voice – dipping from high to low – brims with tranquil optimism. He didn't invent the formula, but if the spliff ain't broke, why fix it?

BAZ DREISINGER

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Riding On," "Wolf Catcher"

ASTONISHING FACT!

At age 6, **KIMYA DAWSON** posed as a model for a computer software catalog. A photo of her playing "Oregon Trail" even made the cover!

FU MANCHU

START THE MACHINE ✪✪✪

DRT

Heavy retro boogie from California stoners, cleaned of stems and seeds

Fu Manchu albums reek of bong-water spilled on shag carpets, and demand to be played on eight-track tape in smoke-filled vans. On their ninth album, they return to a high school parking lot, circa 1973, and hang out with the dead-end kids. Unlike many stoner-rock peers, they bring a refreshing sense of melody and brevity. Each tune clocks in under three minutes, and every wide-screen riff is calculated to crush sternums. Gear heads will have a headphone orgy: Guitar tones thicker than Billy Gibbons's molasses drawl and rhino-herd drums make Mountain sound puny. They even toss in a few change-ups, such as the chilled neo-surf instrumental "Out to Sea." But mostly, Fu Manchu get their rampage on.

GREG KOT

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Written In Stone," "Out to Sea," "Open Your Eyes"

Pat Green: Maybe we'll hitch a ride with someone else. . . .

Jimmy Bruch

PAT GREEN

LUCKY ONES ✪✪✪

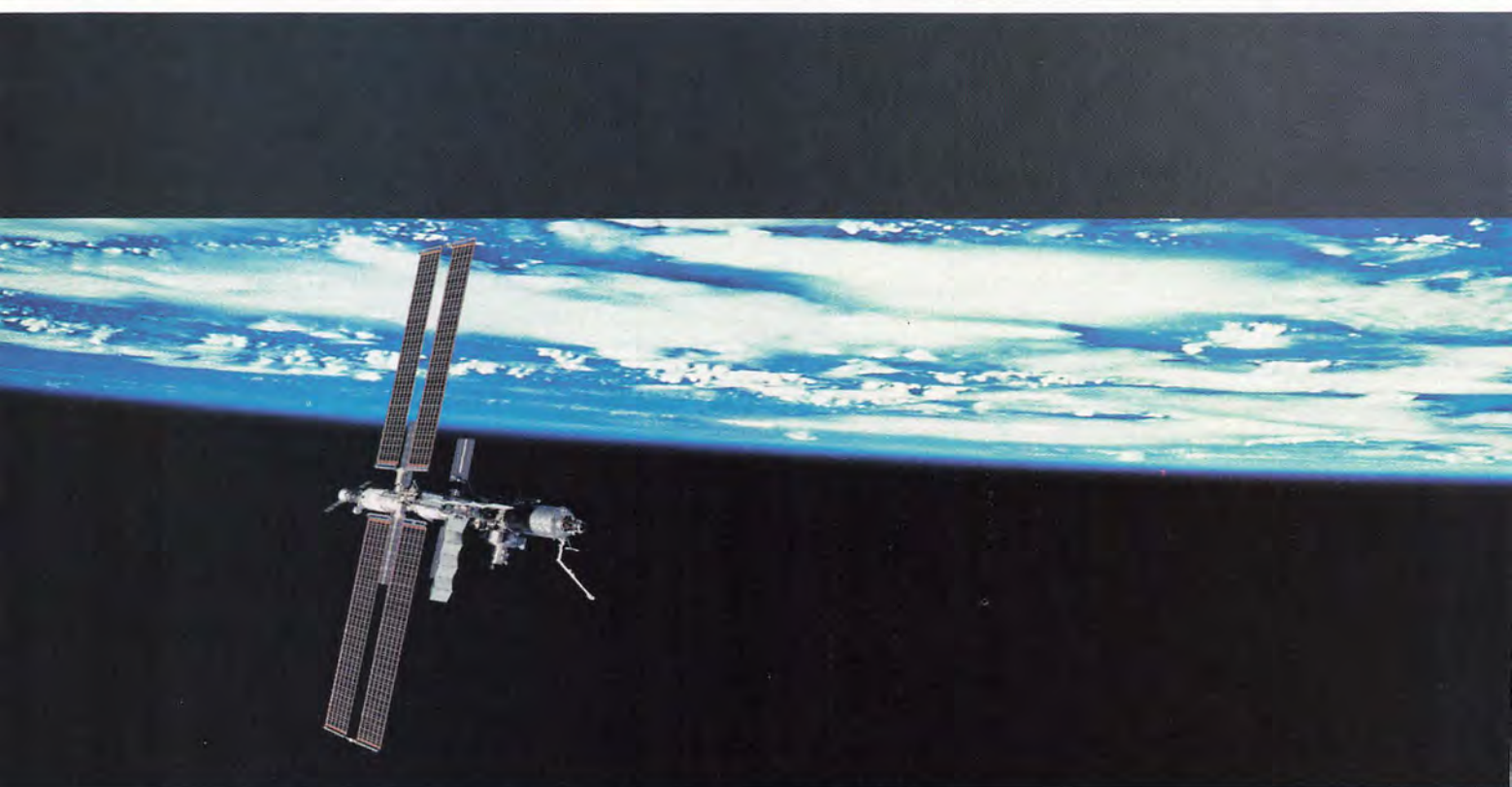
UNIVERSAL SOUTH

Amiable Texas troubadour keeps on truckin' (and fishin' and drinkin' . . .)

Usually, by the time a musician hits album eight, he gets a bit bored or a little adventurous. Not Pat Green. The San Antonio-born singer-songwriter won his following with songs steeped in Lone Star iconography and down-home charm, and *Lucky Ones* isn't about to mess that up. It's got plenty of Jimmy-Buffet-Jr. good times – falling head-over-heels at the local honky-tonk, soaking up sun in the Gulf – a couple of standouts (the lovely, tender "My Little Heaven," and "College," destined to fuel drunken frat-party singalongs for semesters to come) and no clunkers. Growth is good, sure. But so is sitting out on the porch, sipping and strumming while the rest of the world whizzes by.

JOSH EELLS

DOWNLOAD THESE: "My Little Heaven," "College"



International space stations, stealth technology and a few projects that technically don't exist — these are just a few of the perks when you're in the United States Air Force. From day one, you'll have a chance to work on the highest applied technology in the world, from

HANDSOME BOY MODELING SCHOOL

WHITE PEOPLE ✪✪✪

ATLANTIC

Linkin Park, De La Soul and more strut their stuff down a warped hip-hop runway

Linkin Park, say hello to John Oates. Cat Power, meet the RZA. These are just some of the guests whom sly production goofballs Prince Paul (De La Soul) and Dan the Automator (Gorillaz, Dr. Octagon) invite to the second installment of their HBMS project. In line with the beautification theme, this set's full of stunning, unlikely makeovers. Jack Johnson's "Breakdown" is an idyllic AOR toe-tapper that includes snatches of an operatic Bollywood soprano. Elsewhere, "The Hours" pits Deftones singer Chino Moreno's mental-ward yowling against dissonant, Arabic-inflected synths. As eclectic as these 13 songs are, they all sound of a piece: Expertly cut and finished with fine details, they boast the kind of style that never goes out of fashion.

G. BEATO

DOWNLOAD THESE: "It's Like That," "I've Been Thinking," "Breakdown"

ROBYN HITCHCOCK

SPOOKED ✪✪✪

YEP ROC

The man who inspired R.E.M. and the Replacements still keeps it up — at 51!

As front man of poppy, influential punk-era outcasts the Soft Boys, Robyn Hitchcock sang surreal lyrics with garage-rock abandon. Twenty solo albums later, the London-born smart-ass is more like a rock essayist. Not that he's lost his taste for the absurd — or his way with a tune. A casual collaboration with acclaimed neo-folkies Gillian Welch and David Rawlings, the acoustic *Spooked* surveys post-millennial life. Intricate and gauzy, "Television" is a poetically arch ode to "the Devil's fishbowl." There're also meditations on war ("If You Know Time") and culture's conflict with spirituality (the gentle, urgent "Sometimes a Blonde"), all sung in Hitchcock's inimitable combination of sandpaper and brass. Picking up a guitar was once his life's answer; now it's an excuse to ask big questions.

NICK CATUCCI

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Sometimes a Blond," "We're Gonna Live In the Trees"

I-20

SELF EXPLANATORY ✪✪

CAPITOL

Ludacris's molasses-voiced homie makes a posse-member record that doesn't suck . . . and then pigs fly!

If your boss were as eccentric as Ludacris, wouldn't some of it rub off? That's the hope going in for I-20, the Atlanta MC who fancies himself a template-smasher (he compares himself to OutKast and Scarface). But no such luck. He spends his debut running down a rap-radio laundry list even *he* sounds bored with. Yes, he brawls on the dancefloor. Yes, he treats groupies like backstage towels. And yes, he devotes a song to cognac and weed.

I LOVE THIS CD!

JACK BLACK
SINGER, ACTOR IN *SHARK TALE, SCHOOL OF ROCK*

LIZ PHAIR
LIZ PHAIR
CAPITOL

"She's a hot little number and she can play guitar. She rules my dreams."

The production's not bad: "Point Them Out," featuring Juvenile, rides cool '80s electro while crunk synths power "Break Bread." But it doesn't help that I-20's sludgy drawl makes him sound like a cassette player running low on batteries.

JONAH WEINER

DOWNLOAD THIS: "Break Bread"

JIN

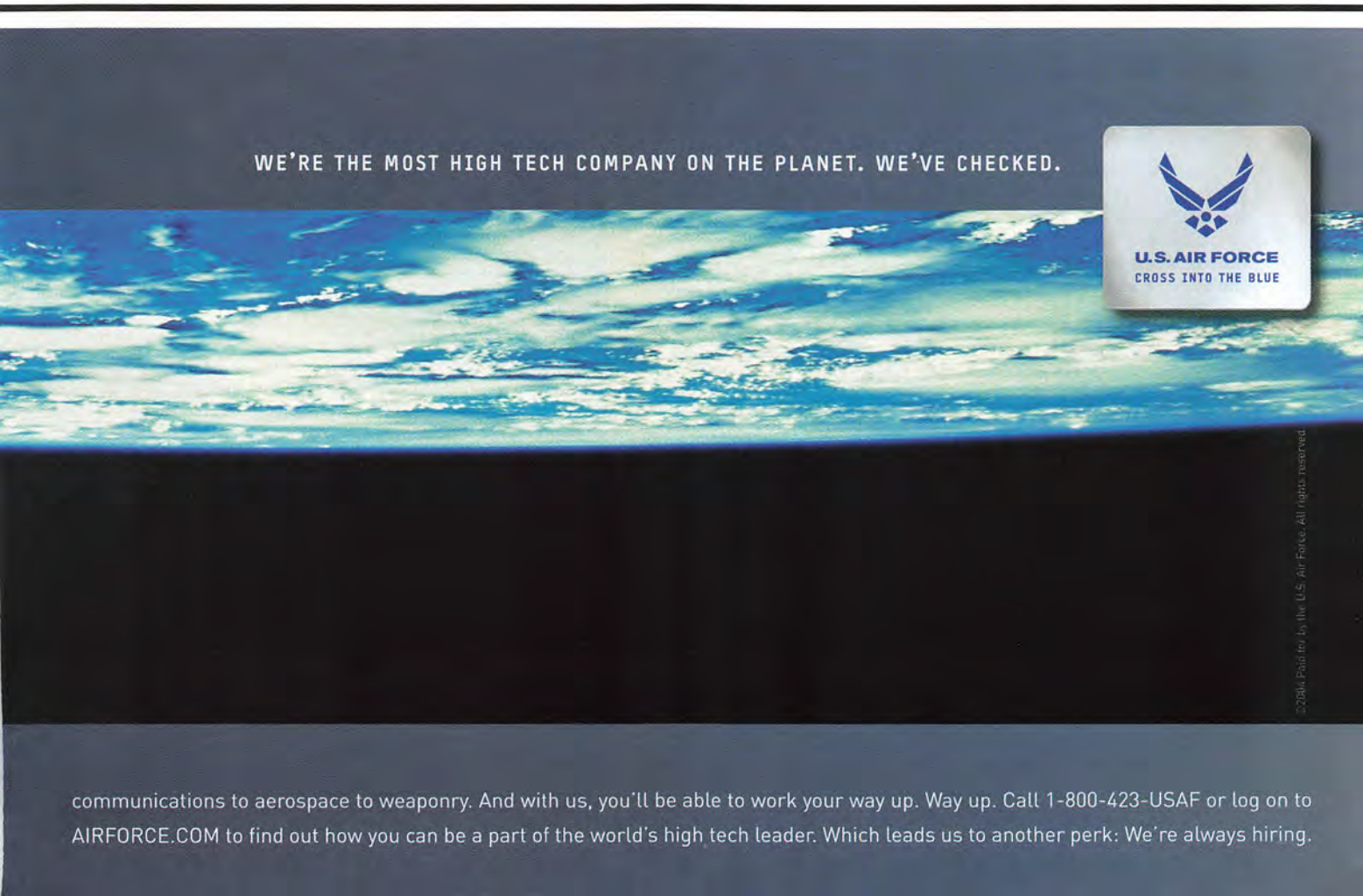
THE REST IS HISTORY ✪✪✪

RUFF RYDERS/VIRGIN

Chinese-American freestyle champ makes good, bad and ugly

Jin Au-Leung is not merely the most prominent Asian-American rapper. As repeated 2002 BET battle-rhyme victories and DMX's approval demonstrated, he's the most promising one, too. The 21-year-old New Yorker brings the bravado on his debut, kicking like a Jet Li roundhouse on the horn-heavy "Get Your Handz Off" and the anti-hater "C'mon." The target of a suspected gang assassination attempt in 2003, it's clear he's tough. But his juice drains on topics specific to his heritage: "Love Story" and "Same Cry" endearingly discuss Black-Asian romance and China's human rights struggle, but are marred by exces- ➔

Grayson Alexander/Retna Ltd.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CROSS INTO THE BLUE
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sively sweet R&B hooks. Meanwhile, the first single, "Learn Chinese," abandons subtlety altogether with producer Wyclef's embarrassing "choi-yoi-yoi" bridge. "I'm not a gimmick," he says on the brooding, Eminem-esque opener "Here Now." He hasn't quite proven that yet.

CHAIRMAN MAO

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Get Your Handz Off," "Here Now," "Thank You"

JUNIOR BOYS

LAST EXIT ✪✪✪✪

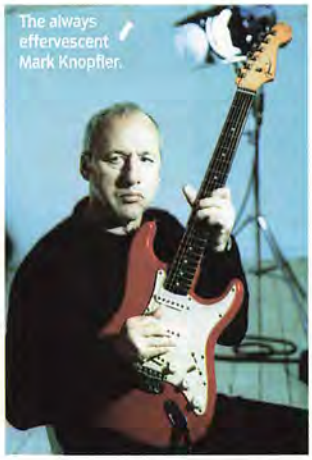
KIN/DOMINO

Dance music is saved by . . . Canadians?

Lately, even electronica junkies have set aside their facepaint and pacifiers and admitted that in the world of synths, all the good ideas have been done. So this debut presents a rarity — a genuinely new sound. The Canadian trio connects the dots between poppy Euro-chillers like Röyksopp and keyboard wonks of the Aphex Twin/Orbital school, then turns them upside down with the arrhythmic thrills of cutting-edge R&B. Sometimes Junior Boys sound like a white Timbaland, at others a robot Prince. The pace is stately, the textures dreamlike and the gaps between these intricate beats so dizzying that the music feels a mile wide. Enchanting, though you'll wonder how it would sound with an MC instead of a weedy white voice.

ANDREW HARRISON

DOWNLOAD THESE: "When I'm Not Around," "Birthday," "More Than Real"



The always effervescent Mark Knopfler.

MORY KANTÉ

SABOU ✪✪✪

RIVERBOAT/WORLD MUSIC NETWORK

Guinean expatriate's roots-revival album a cut above the rest

Many fine West African musicians migrate to Paris, and nearly as many eventually cut an acoustic album celebrating their tribal heritage. Mande tribesman Mory Kanté moved north in 1984 and had a dancefloor hit with "Yéké Yéké." Six dance-pop albums later, *Sabou* (which means "cause") is a consistently beautiful, if somewhat samey, blend of traditional instruments and sassy vocal chorus. At the center of this tightly meshed groovemobile is a guitar, Kanté's tonally cascading 21-stringed *kora*, an instrument that he wails on as though it were harp, and a Middle Eastern *oud* all at once. And you don't need to know that the tunes discuss poverty, tribal tolerance and adult-male circumcision to feel the heat.

RICHARD GEHR

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Nafiya," "Djou," "Désolé"

MARK KNOPFLER

SHANGRI-LA ✪✪

WARNER BROS.

Laidback guitar hero travels at one speed: mellow

In his post-Dire Straits career, Mark Knopfler sounds less like the "Money for Nothing" MTV icon and more like J.J. Cale, that master of just-rolled-off-the-couch blues. Like Cale, Knopfler prefers murmuring to emoting while threading fancy little guitar figures through songs that can't decide whether to shuffle into the haze or nod off. On his fourth solo album, *Shangri-La*, he takes on big subjects: a boxing icon ("Song for Sonny Liston"), Elvis ("Back to Tupelo") and the biggest mack daddy of them all, McDonald's founder Ray Kroc ("Boom, Like That"). But the wistful melodies make them shrink from view. Only "Postcards From Paraguay" throws a hint of South American sizzle into the mix. Otherwise Knopfler never breaks a sweat.

GREG KOT

DOWNLOAD THIS: "Back to Tupelo"

Getting Religion

"America is vapid," booger-loving Cali punks declare

GREEN DAY

AMERICAN IDIOT ✪✪✪

REPRISE

THOUGH MANY PEOPLE run screaming from the phrase "rock opera," there's always another hit-maker ready to turn high-concept, and make fans ponder Life's Big Matters. On his group's seventh album, bedhead auteur Billie Joe Armstrong courts comparisons to the mama of all rock operas — *Tommy* by the Who. Armstrong wants to do for Green Day what Townshend's epic did for his band in 1969: escape a scene (snot-punk, while the Who had mod) and an image (ass jokes instead of guitar smashing).

Trickier structures and posh arrangements (a vibraphone?) quickly defy punk expectations. Two nine-minute tracks introduce characters who struggle for transcendence, but fall under society's boot. Green Day surround these expanded blockbusters with ballads and rockers that rail against consumer culture, skewer organized religion and family. Heavy stuff, lightly grilled.

The best songs are about girls as well as politics. "She's a Rebel" is a delightful ode to an activist heroine, while "Extraordinary Girl" uses an ascending riff to show Armstrong's gift for mixing tough and tender. Other stabs at significance hit and miss — "Are We the Waiting" fails as an anthem by being utter nonsense, but "Wake Me Up When September Ends" is a letter-perfect high school bedroom weepie.

Armstrong's insights are still bong-fueled, but the way his cracked croon bounces off Mike Dirnt's popcorn bass and Tre Cool's murderous drum makes the lyrics sound more intricate than they are. Concept or not, *American Idiot* is still decent fodder for a mosh pit, a laugh and a sob session. Just don't think too hard about it.

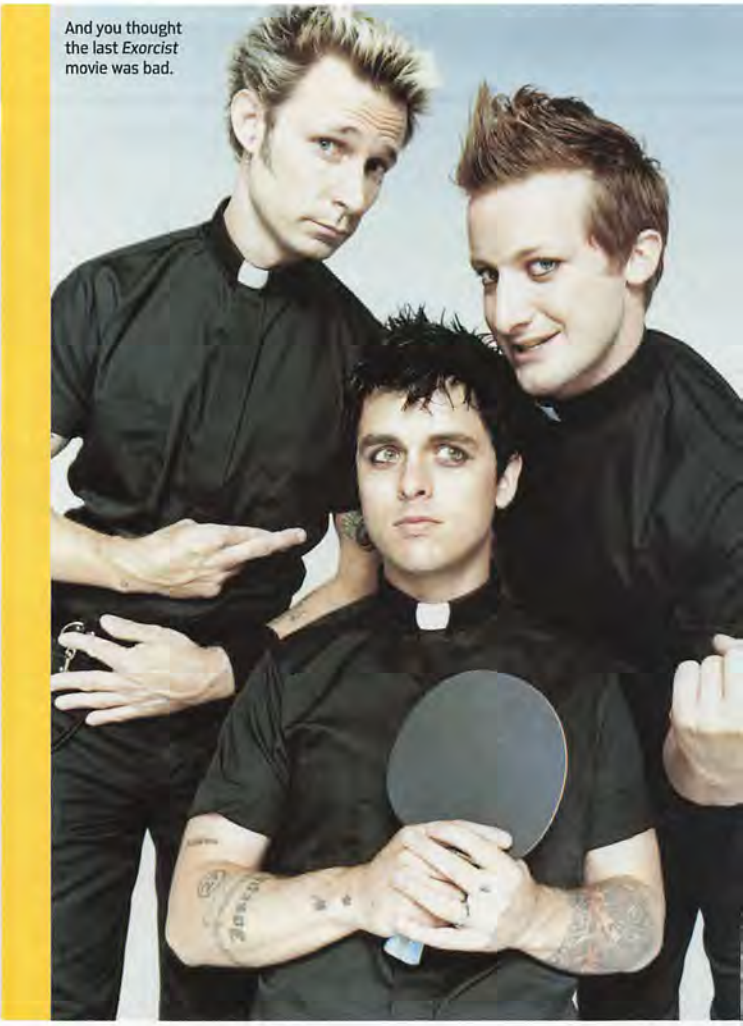
ANN POWERS

DOWNLOAD THESE: "She's a Rebel," "Extraordinary Girl"

BILLIE JOE ARMSTRONG'S CURRENT LISTENING:

LIAM LYNCH
FAKE SONGS *S-CURVE*

MORRISSEY
YOU ARE THE QUARRY *ATTACK/SANCTUARY*



And you thought the last *Exorcist* movie was bad.

Le Tigre: "No, the White Stripes copied *us*."

LAMB OF GOD

ASHES OF THE WAKE ✪✪✪✪

WARNER BROS.

VA headbangers jump to the majors, still make air-guitar fingers itch

GRRR! RRROW! ARRRGH!

Any dyed-in-the-black-T-shirt metalhead knows the key to heavy is the riff, and Lamb of God's dual-guitar assault updates the anvil-dropping thud of titanium lords past with nimble genius. On their third record, they meld melodic black-metal with artful, Middle-Eastern dissonance, as drummer Chris Adler ferociously drives the rhythms from machine-gun attacks to slow-motion chugs. Shrieking like a battle-torn orc, Randy Blythe bashes President Bush, corporations, and all other forms of authority, but it's the guitars that dominate the maelstrom, with catchy, teeth-sinking frenetics. Since Pantera are defunct and Metallica have long since abandoned the first five letters of their name, L.O.G. now sit atop metal's studded throne.

D. SHAWN BOSLER

DOWNLOAD THIS: "Laid to Rest," "Now You've Got Something to Die For," "One Gun

TED LEO/ PHARMACISTS

SHAKE THE SHEETS ✪✪✪✪

LOOKOUT!

New Jersey songwriter creates odes about back streets, speaks for the common man. Sound familiar?

"I put it to you plain and bluntly/I'm worried for my tired country," sings Ted Leo on his anti-war ode "The One Who Got Us Out." But Leo makes fatigue rock. He's a disciple of late '70s British pub rock and the hard fast ethic of '80s punk, and adds a half-dozen modern swing and shuffle rhythms. The record's imperfect, because Leo often plays at hardcore speed, blurring his catchy lyrics and causing him to lose steam after three irresistible opening tracks. But after years of non-stop U.S. touring, including a gig during NYC's great 2003 blackout, much of his fourth album sounds like a pop-punk update on Springsteen, another relentless live performer and proud NJ native.

ALEC HANLEY BEMIS

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Me and Mia," "The Angels' Share," "The One Who Got Us Out"

LE TIGRE

THE ISLAND ✪✪

STRUMMER/UNIVERSAL

NYC riot women try to go mainstream, fail to start the party

Where Le Tigre once put the party in party politics, they now sing about fun without delivering any. Singer Kathleen Hanna's feminist electro-punk trio always straddled the line between inspired and irritating: as they carefully point out, their objective is visibility. (This appearance on a major label after years as flag-wavers for indie rock is an attempt to bring their lefty politics to more Delia's shoppers.) They just sound cranky here, and their beats are mostly perfunctory. They cover the Pointer Sisters' "I'm So Excited," paraphrase '80s body-rock princesses J.J. Fad, and drop buzz-bomb guitar samples, but their attempts at pop outreach seem unenthusiastically tactical, and the album's antiwar centerpiece "New Kicks" is a charmless, thumping catastrophe.

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD THIS: "Viz"

LIARS ACADEMY

DEMONS ✪✪

EQUAL VISION

Baltimore foursome violates Emo Rule Number 16: "Must actually be sad"

Ryan Shelkett wants so badly to be miserable. On his band's first album – 2001's *No News Is Good News* – the Liars Academy headmaster moaned about his "Quarter Life Crisis"; now he's thinking about checking out before his midlife ➔

Previous page, from top: Fabio Lovino; Marina Chavez. This page: Danielle Levitt

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crisis hits. But despite the melodramatic guitars backing it up (veteran emo producer J. Robbins's stock-in-trade), Shelkett's pain is never very convincing. "I'm about to jump off a bridge or something," he half-threatens on "Microtron," his heart clearly not in it. On the other hand, when they put away the Kleenex and embrace their pop-rockers (like on the Wallflowers-y slacker anthem "Saturday Night"), Liars Academy sound charmingly genuine. If only Shelkett would quit whining long enough to realize it.

JOSH EELLS

DOWNLOAD THIS: "Saturday Night"

LUNA

RENDEZVOUS ✪✪✪✪

JETSET

Fifth consecutive album of gorgeous songs from NYC's dream-pop specialists

VELVET UNDERGROUND JR.

Two years have passed; time for another great Luna record. Leader Dean Wareham eschews anything trendy, building songs from classic pop's sturdiest raw materials: guitars, stately tempos and a sprinkling of stardust melody. As usual, his songs balance melancholy and whimsy; whether mooning over a lover (the charging "Malibu Love Nest") or riffing on Victorian poet Edward Lear ("The Owl & The Pussycat"), they bristle with weird imagery ("Cindy tastes of barbecue/Cindy tastes of cream/I made a promise to the hills"), which he delivers in the best rock monotone this side of Lou Reed. But the real hero is Sean Eden, whose lyrical lead guitar — a bit Harrison, a bit Morricone — makes even the silliest songs sound majestic.

JODY ROSEN

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Speedbumps," "The Owl & The Pussycat," "Astronaut"

TRAVIS MORRISON

TRAVISTAN ✪✪✪

BARSUK

Dismemberment Plan singer/smart-ass makes most of his freedom on solo debut

Travis Morrison, goofy former frontman of D.C. emo-funk experimentalists Dismemberment Plan, is a quavery-voiced indie rock eccentric but no mere oddball. At worst, the wordy *Travistan* borders on hectoring ("Che Guevara Poster"). At his danceable best, Morrison ingeniously manifests his big concepts and even bigger heart. On the intellectual side, there's the jazzy "Get Me Off This Coin A," which opens a multi-cut thread narrated from the point of view of various American Presidents (Thomas Jefferson: "I like my nations in constant revolution and my booty wide"). The electro-inflected "Song for the Orca," meanwhile, is a touchingly childlike promise of freedom to captive animals. Liberation, whether for beast or man-boy musicians, feeds Morrison's ample inspiration.

NICK CATUCCI

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Change," "My Two Front Teeth, Parts 2 and 3"

MOS DEF

THE NEW DANGER ✪✪✪

GEFFEN

On his first album in five years, rap's best actor hams it up

Mos Def has a strong second career as an actor, and now that he's back to his original calling, he's still hamming it up. This is the hip-hop equivalent of an all-stops-pulled, Oscar-ready performance: mushily sentimental, self-righteously indignant and constantly in your face. He wants to be all rap to all people, keeping it bare and raw with bass drum, tambourine and little else on "Sex, Love & Money," while thrashing loudly yet datedly with his rock band Black Jack Johnson. The many characters here include sexy Boogie Man, boxing warrior Black Jack and a street hero who's "like James Brown, getting involved" — but like a lot of Hollywood efforts, it's too long and too preachy.

BEN SISARIO

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Sunshine," "Ghetto Rock"

THE MUSIC

WELCOME TO THE NORTH ✪✪✪

CAPITOL

Overly literal English dance-rockers who like playing, uh, music. Guess where they're from!

Even before the Darkness, the Music were proudly rocking some crazily high male singing. But unlike Justin Hawkins, the far younger, more naive Robert Harvey never seemed to get his own silliness. As hipsters, the Yorkshire quartet are still total non-starters, but this second album sees producer →

I LOVE THIS CD!

MELISSA JOAN HART
ACTRESS ON SABRINA THE TEENAGE WITCH

BREAKING BENJAMIN
WE ARE NOT ALONE
HOLLYWOOD

"I love them. I can listen to them all day, and there are very few bands I can do that with."

Grayson Alexander/Retna Ltd.

Jimmy Eat World: "Waiter? We'll have the world!"

Kevin Scanlon

Getting Carded

Emo vets are the genre's first to grow up

JIMMY EAT WORLD

FUTURES ★★★★

INTERSCOPE

EMO OFFERS OPPORTUNITIES for many things: public sobbing, the unrequited longing of teenage girls, half-off at Hot Topic. But one thing the genre has never provided is maturity. Emo acts don't burn up or fade away — they break up or graduate.

Jimmy Eat World has been the exception, as evidenced by the Arizona band's breakthrough three years ago with "The Middle." The hit song, ubiquitous on teen-movie soundtracks, anchored their third, self-titled album, a whip-smart collection the mainstream and your troubled little sister could love, and emo's first (to date, biggest) breakthrough.

Well, no wonder. Front guy Jim Adkins has a golden touch for rich tunes that swell with a yearbook-photo-esque nostalgia. Introspection made 1999's noodly *Clarity* a fan favorite, but all it got the band was dropped by their label. *Futures* splits the difference between *Clarity* and *Billboard* success: Adkins loosens the reins with darker themes and longer songs (including emo's first piano power-ballad "Drugs or Me"), but the guitars and harmonies have never been brighter. On the best song, "Work," Adkins confesses, "It's just not me to wear it on my sleeve/Count on that for sure." Like the bastard love-child of John Hughes and Seth Cohen, it's so gilded with skying melodies, translucent finger-picking, and Livejournal.com-worthy angst you don't know whether to hug it or ask it to the prom.

SKYING MELODIES AND ANGST

On the stunning "Polaris" and "The World You Love," Adkins tackles grownup concerns like crumbling relationships and pill-fueled ennui. Every big emo act is fearless about feelings, but screaming gets old fast. With a flair for the dramatic and the gorgeous hook, Adkins converts whining into fine wine. For eight years Jimmy Eat World have been called one of the best emo bands in America. Maybe it's time to lose the "e" word.

ANDY GREENWALD

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Work," "The World You Love," "Polaris"

JIM ADKINS'S CURRENT LISTENING:

BLONDE REDHEAD
MISERY IS A BUTTERFLY *4AD*

RYAN ADAMS
LOVE IS HELL *LOST HIGHWAY*

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Words & Music:
John Mellencamp's
Greatest Hits

Tears For Fears
Everybody Loves
A Happy Ending

Brendan O'Brien (Pearl Jam, Bruce Springsteen) honing their gonzo essence to more sizeable effect. The title track's rallying cry ("It's where I'm from!") is guileless to the point of cluelessness, but the Jane's Addiction groove has momentum. Harvey's voice remains pretty terrifying, though: Does he know how much he sounds like Klaus Meine from '80s Euro-metal goons the Scorpions? Somebody should have a word.

STEVE LOWE

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Welcome to the North," "Open Your Mind"

WILLIE NELSON

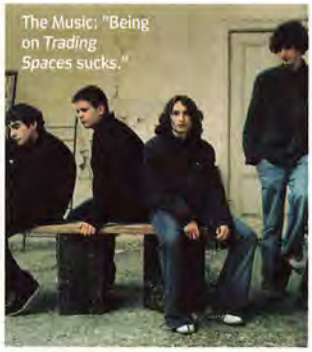
IT ALWAYS WILL BE ✪✪✪

OUTLAWS AND ANGELS ✪✪✪

LOST HIGHWAY

Free Willie! Nelson's mourning becomes eclectic

With four new albums in two years, Willie Nelson is at risk of becoming the Guided by Voices of Texas country – incredibly prolific, often not entirely sober, and thus inclined to release most everything he puts on


The Music: "Being on *Trading Spaces* sucks."

tape. He mostly gets away with it because, at 71, he's still varied enough to sound completely at home crooning Townes Van Zandt's ballad "Pancho and Lefty" with Merle Haggard and Toby Keith, and joining Los Lonely Boys on a breezy cover of the War's funk anthem "Cisco Kid," both of which he does on *Outlaws and Angels*, his third album of live duets in as many years. Less conceptual and stronger for it, *It Always Will Be* simply presents Nelson singing downcast songs like "Picture In a Frame" with a folkie's sense of doom and a jazzman's knack for phrasing. More than anything else he's done in years, this album shows off the catholic talent that attracted all those duet partners in the first place.

ROBERT LEVINE

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Picture in a Frame," "Over Time" (*It Will Always Be*), "Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow" feat. Carole King, "Cisco Kid" feat. Los Lonely Boys (*Outlaws and Angels*)

THE NERVOUS RETURN

WAKE UP DEAD ✪✪✪

LA SALLE/ATLANTIC

Los Angeles art-punk, courtesy of blink-182 drummer's new boutique label

Travis Barker is the guy in blink-182 who doesn't ask you to pull his finger. Quiet and severe, he's their mohawked straight man, and by signing this foursome to his boutique label, Barker confirms he's got more than pop-punk on the brain. Led by Jason Muller – part singer, part drunken wailer – Nervous Return make twitchy rock indebted to '80s hipness. "Dramahead" flirts with new wave while "Siberian Queer" evokes no-wave noise. The guitars – pining, sailing, jabbing and carving – are pure Pixies, an influence repeated in the seedy, sex-laced lyrics. The songs are about meds, S&M, horny 9-to-5ers in midlife crises, and a self-hating homosexual who jerks off to Tom Cruise. Bizarre stuff, which comes in handy when the band's refusal to employ melody starts to feel like an inability.

JONAH WEINER

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Dramahead," "Murder Weapon"

THE NEVILLE BROTHERS

WALKIN' IN THE SHADOW OF LIFE ✪✪✪

BACK PORCH

Key modern New Orleans band remembers what made the city a wellspring: a good sense of rhythm

The Neville Brothers' first studio album in five years, *Walkin' In the Shadow of Life* is touted for its return to funk, its personal songwriting, its fraternal togetherness, and

Still Standing

Georgia greats make their best record in several years

R.E.M.

AROUND THE SUN ✪✪✪

WARNER BROS.

FOR OVER A decade, R.E.M. have been evolving into the Michael Stipe Band. Through the group's descent from top of the pops to prestigious marginality, the singer has been taking over their music, with no apparent dissension, and the solid-bottomed, airily articulated band sound that made R.E.M. famous has faded.

So although they continue to divide songwriting credits equally, R.E.M.'s recent albums have increasingly resembled singer-songwriter records. *Around the Sun* is much the best of the last three, not because it puts Stipe furthest upfront, but because the tunes are better. Through track seven, strong choruses are the rule, and they stage a comeback at the end, especially for the indomitable title clincher. And sometimes there's more: On the opening track and lead single, "Leaving New York," and "Electron Blue" right after, guitar-piano-voice and synth-piano-strings-voice create arresting musical moods within seconds – the choruses are just kickers.

Of course, singer-songwriters' tunes are supposed to deliver lyrics, and the words certainly aren't drivel. Stipe claims to have politicized his writing against his own best artistic judgment, but too often this halfhearted propaganda is masked in lines which evoke distressed friendships and romances that are never pinned down. Rather than dreamlike, always R.E.M.'s shtick, they seem a mite evasive. Even "Leaving New York" has more breakup than 9/11 in it. In the relatively explicit "Final Straw," you might not know "Who died and lifted you up to perfection?" was an anti-Bush cry – unless you were in the market for one, which is how megastars so often play it.

ROBERT CHRISTGAU

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Around the Sun," "Leaving New York"

MICHAEL STIPE'S CURRENT LISTENING:

BJÖRK
MEDULLA *ELEKTRA*

RADIOHEAD
HAIL TO THE THIEF *CAPITOL*

R.E.M. HAVE EVOLVED INTO THE MICHAEL STIPE BAND.

Queen Latifah: "This one's for you, anonymous city skyline!"

all that jazz. These things are true, and to the good. But the album's secret hero is an outsider: Producer Milton Davis, a seasoned John Mellencamp henchman who mans the bass on every track. Even working at it, the Nevilles are hit-or-miss songwriters, and though brother Aaron's buttery tenor saves his *frères* by floating over their gruff harmonies, and then steals the reggae standard "Rivers of Babylon" from the Melodians, it can't carry a whole album on its own. Instead, the groove that Davis anchors bears the weight: "Junkie Child" would be very close to junk without it, and "Carry the Torch" a dim thing.

ROBERT CHRISTGAU

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Kingdom Come," "Rivers of Babylon"

ASTONISHING FACT!

When **TED LEO** was 13, he performed with a breakdancing crew called "The Breaks." His B-boy name? Captain Freeze.

NEW YORK DOLLS

LIVE FROM ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL 2004 ✪✪✪✪

SANCTUARY

Live album from the lipsticked banshees who inspired the Sex Pistols, Guns N' Roses and Libertines

"Can you believe that Sylvain *tunes* his guitar now?" That's singer David Johansen, teasing guitarist Sylvain Sylvain and noting that in returning to the stage at the behest of former fan-club president Morrissey, the New York Dolls are different from the high-heeled hooligans who dropped two albums of shocking color and vitality on a world that hardly noticed them in the early '70s. Different because three members are long since dead (a fourth, bassist Arthur "Killer" Kane, expired from leukemia shortly after this spring London concert). But also, aided by disciples and ringers, the Dolls charge with a musicianly focus that was originally beyond their ability or interest. Still thin as a bookie's mustache, Johansen, even at 50, brays about his need for excitement, and the band is divine: mewling like tomcats, loose as pudding.

ROB TANNENBAUM

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Personality Crisis," "Private World"

QUEEN LATIFAH

THE DANA OWENS ALBUM ✪✪✪

VECTOR/FLAVOR UNIT/INTERSCOPE

Oscar-nominated rapper/CEO reveals yet another side: her soft one

Rappers-turned-actors are a dime a dozen. But rappers-turned-actors-turned-lounge singers? All hail Queen Latifah, aka Dana Owens: cabaret-style blues singer, the sultry sort you might find – no, *did* find – in the film *Chicago*. Latifah has a pleasant, if not inimitable, voice, so these cover songs make for easy listening. Sometimes too easy: Her even tone lacks the emotional intensity for a track like Cannonball Adderley's "Mercy, Mercy, Mercy"; when Latifah sings "have a little bit of mercy for your mama," she's politely inquiring, not passionately pleading. The stellar tracks eschew passionate for playful or coy, tones that make us forget: Is this the same artist who boldly tutored women to "let 'em know, you ain't a bitch or a ho"?

BAZ DREISINGER

DOWNLOAD THESE: "California"

RAZORLIGHT

UP ALL NIGHT ✪✪✪

VERTIGO/UNIVERSAL

London's self-appointed saviors of rock attempt to live up to their own hype

Johnny Borrell is a legend in his own mind. In the British press, the Razorlight front man, a squat-scene associate of the Libertines, has loftily compared himself to both Bob Dylan and Orson Welles. Wanting something don't make it so, but Borrell's untrammeled self-belief helps his derivative garage rock (step up, Television and Patti Smith) crackle with charisma. He's got songwriting chops, too. "Rip it Up" is how the Strokes would sound if they didn't mind breaking a sweat, and "(Don't Go Back To) Dalston," where Borrell begs Libertine Pete Doherty to avoid a drug-infested quarter of East London, is manic with conviction. If Borrell's originality ever equals his confidence, Razorlight might be as good as he thinks they are.

DORIAN LYNSKEY

DOWNLOAD THESE: "In the City," "Rip It Up"

THE IKE REILLY ASSASSINATION

SPARKLE IN THE FINISH ✪✪✪

ROCK RIDGE

Former hotel doorman from Chicago celebrates lowlifes and tallboys

It's not very pretty being a smart-ass 41-year-old singer-songwriter with a drinking problem and a voice like an electric juicer. Ike Reilly's 2001 debut, *Salesmen and Racists*, cast him as an indie-rock Steve Buscemi, an oily empath of life's losers. It was a minor gem, but he seemed destined to be a character actor, never the lead. Reilly's snappy garage-punk is still lousy with boozed-up nogoodniks and girls he can never hope to satisfy. His voice, if you can even call it that – a more-Dylan-than-Dylan sneer – suits his jaundiced tales of middle-age futility, as on "Garbage Day," when he's reminded of an ex at a bluegrass festival and a strip club. Sometimes, drunks are damn funny company.

CRAIG MARKS

DOWNLOADS: "Holiday In New York," "Whatever Happened to the Girl In Me?"

NANCY SINATRA

NANCY SINATRA ✪✪✪✪

SANCTUARY

Frank's femme-fatale daughter enlists U2, Sonic Youth and Morrissey for a fine comeback

Nancy Sinatra was the 1960s' premier sex kitten with claws. Decades before Madonna, she belted out "These Boots Are Made for Walkin'," perfecting a leer-but-don't-touch persona. Nearly 40 years later, Sinatra commands an A-list fleet of songwriters: On "Don't Let Him Waste Your Time," Pulp's Jarvis Cocker continues the putdown tradition of "Boots," while Bono and the Edge provide "Two Shots of Happy, One Shot of Sad," a regretful saloon ballad that would have fit Frank perfectly. Best of all, Morrissey's gorgeous "Let Me ➜

I LOVE THIS CD!

JAMIE FOXX
ACTOR IN *COLLATERAL, RAY*

G-UNIT
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G-UNIT/INTERSCOPE

"I like how they're putting it all together. I like 50 Cent's hustle and the talent he's got."

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Kiss You" makes a delicious match of Sinatra's cool voice and his wistful crooning. Throughout, Sinatra carries herself like a legend should: She's a poised pop queen, ready to be worshiped once again.

JON YOUNG

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Don't Let Him Waste Your Time," "Let Me Kiss You," "Burnin' Down the Spark"

SON, AMBULANCE

KEY ✪✪

SADDLE CREEK

Former Bright Eyes sidekick successfully blends into the background

As a sensitive Nebraskan singer-songwriter with a wobbly voice and a penchant for twisty, slow-building epics, Son, Ambulance's Joe Knapp inevitably toils in the shadow of labelmate and Bright Eyes melodramatist Conor Oberst. (Typical of the incestuous Saddle Creek family tree, Son, Ambulance's first release was a split EP with Bright Eyes.) But despite their surface similarities, Knapp's wide-eyed songs lack the unnerving distinction and eccentricity that are Oberst's stock-in-trade. Less monotonous than 2001's piano-heavy *Euphemystic*, this modest mouse of an album tries to branch out — a New Wave echo here, a Celtic tint there — but the results are vague and timid: wallflower pop that goes out of its way to be ignored.

DENNIS LIM

DOWNLOAD THIS: "Paper Snowflakes"

MATTHEW SWEET

KIMI GA SUKI * RAIFU ✪✪✪

LIVING THINGS ✪✪✪

SUPERDEFORMED/RCAM

Bearer of power-pop standards back with double dose of ear candy

Initially released last year solely in Japan, Matthew Sweet's *Kimi Ga Suki * Raifu* proved too irresistible to remain an Asian exclusive. The Beatles-adoring singer-songwriter wrote and recorded it in a rush, skipping the demo process and employing many of the same musicians (including Television guitarist Richard Lloyd) from his 1991 melody epic "Girlfriend." The result is Sweet's most focused album in years, showcasing talents as both an infectious rocker ("I Love You") and a vulnerable balladeer ("Wait"). On *Living Things*, Sweet gilds a set of acoustic-based numbers with slide guitar, mandolin, steel drums and piano from Brian Wilson collaborator Van Dyke Parks. With "Wow, sunshine is marvelous" as its theme, it sounds lush and idyllic enough, even if it seems Sweet blew his A material on *Kimi*.

ROSS RAIHALA

DOWNLOAD THESE "Morning Song," "I Love You," "Tonight We Ride" (*Kimi Ga Suki * Raifu*), "Push the Feelings" (*Living Things*)

UNKLE

NEVER, NEVER, LAND ✪✪✪

GLOBAL UNDERGROUND

Ex-trip-hoppers rediscover the champagne supernova years

Six years after the trip-hop/art-rock hybrid *Psyence Fiction*, James Lavelle's studio project UNKLE has finally finished a second album. It's a very different UNKLE, though: turntable master DJ Shadow is gone, and Lavelle and new singer-songwriter Richard File juice up the mid-'90s Brit-rock of the Verve and Oasis with intricate, club-wise production. Like last time, there are plenty of guests: Queens of the Stone Age's Josh Homme sings a paraphrase of Radiohead's "Idioteque" called "Safe In Mind," and a couple of ex-Stone Roses reconvene for "Reign." File's contributions are unabashedly derivative of Brit-rock's glory years, but Lavelle's always had an ear for hot beats (and beatmakers), and the pulse underscoring the album keeps it hopping when the songs meander.

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Safe In Mind," "What Are You To Me?" →

I LOVE THIS CD!

BETTE MIDLER
SINGER, ACTRESS IN *THE STEPFORD WIVES*, *BEACHES*

FAITH HILL
CRY
WARNER BROS.

"She has a great voice and sings some whopper ballads. I worked with her on *The Stepford Wives* and it was nice to find out those pipes belong to a sweet girl."

From top: Courtesy of Global Underground; Grayson Alexander/Retna Ltd.

Elliott Smith, 1969–2003.

R.I.P.

The last testament from indie-pop's King of Pain

ELLIOTT SMITH

FROM A BASEMENT ON THE HILL ★★★★

ANTI-/EPITAPH

For legions of mopey indie kids, Elliott Smith was the drug of choice. He chronicled addictions and broken relationships with a bruised tunefulness that melted the spite and self-absorption at the core of his five albums. No one wrote lovelier junkie lullabies or sweeter poisoned valentines. He seemed to share your pain, even while fixated on his own, and he knew how to make it pretty, which for the duration of a pop song was the same thing as making it better.

LOVELY JUNKIE LULLABIES

Last October, Smith cemented his tragic legend — and exposed the limits of music's power to redeem misery — when he died from apparently self-inflicted stab wounds to his chest. A posthumous album was assembled from recordings the 34-year-old left behind. Anyone combing this last testament for clues to his mindset won't have to work too hard.

The titles alone can make you wince: "Strung Out Again," "Last Hour," "A Fond Farewell." On one barely coded suicide note after another, he searches for "a beautiful place to get lost," "a better place where we can spend eternity," "a place where time reverses." The death-haunted mood isn't new: Smith's career, from spartan home-recorded folk to baroque pop, now seems strewn with omens. But his bleakness was never this naked or all-consuming.

Smith's mood turns nearly bipolar on "Memory Lane," which is dejected yet hysterically jaunty. But more often, the stressed, restless music takes a cue from the tumult in his head. Roiling rockers "Coast to Coast" and "Don't Go Down" are at once bracing and fatigued, with layers of distortion swamping brittle vocals. For his devoted fans, Smith's music was a salve, transforming despair into sweet melodic ache. On his heartbreaking final album, he's left a potent reality check — a reminder that pain isn't pretty, and sometimes, beauty isn't enough.

DENNIS LIM

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Don't Go Down," "A Fond Farewell," "Memory Lane"

LIKE THIS? TRY THIS!

IRON & WINE
THE CREEK DRANK . . . *SUB POP*

CAT POWER
MOON PIX *MATADOR*

Courtesy of Anti- Records

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NONESUCH RHINO

Holly Williams: "No, you *can't* sit next to me."

VARIOUS ARTISTS

ENJOY EVERY SANDWICH: THE SONGS OF WARREN ZEVON ✪✪✪

ARTEMIS

A posthumous nod to a songwriter's songwriter from some likely and unlikely suspects

As evidenced by his lone solo hit, 1978's novelty noir song "Werewolves of London," the late Warren Zevon was a breed apart, a So-Cal cynic who made misanthropy romantic by hammering away at himself as much as the accursed world around him. This warm-spirited tribute features mostly straightforward one-offs – like Springsteen's respectful "My Ride's Here," and Dylan's conspiratorial "Mutineer." But it's the unexpected turns that stick: Steve Earle's tough-loving "Reconsider Me"; the Pixies appropriately thrashing through "Ain't That Pretty At All"; and Jill Sobule exploring the sweet pain of existence on "Don't Let Us Get Sick." Zevon did get sick, of course, but that dark heart still beats through these singular songs.

BILLY ALTMAN

DOWNLOAD THESE: Steve Earle "Reconsider Me," Jill Sobule "Don't Let Us Get Sick"

VARIOUS ARTISTS

HARD-HEADED WOMAN: A CELEBRATION OF WANDA JACKSON ✪✪

BLOODSHOT

Tribute to rockabilly queen could stand to rock a little more

Wanda Jackson was rockabilly's sole female hitmaker; her explosive style could scare the pomade out of Elvis's ducktail, and she had even greater success going country in the '60s. Though she cut weepers, she also liked one-upping the boys, and she regarded partying as an extreme sport. Americana singers have revered her since Rosie Flores brought her out of retirement in 1995, but apparently few can measure up to her. Among slow songs here, only Trailer Bride's disturbing, Brechtian reinvention of "Fujiyama Mama" stands out. Much better are rockers like leather-lunged Candye Kane's bluesy "Rock Your Baby" and Wayne Hancock's "Let's Have a Party." The rest is either hard country so overwrought it's parody, or pop fluff with twang.

JOHN MORTHLAND

DOWNLOAD THESE: Trailer Bride "Fujiyama Mama"

VARIOUS ARTISTS

MAYBE THIS CHRISTMAS TREE ✪✪✪

NETTWERK

Indie stars cry over spilled eggnog on non-traditional Christmas comp

The wistful *Maybe This Christmas Tree* isn't a soundtrack for ecstatically opening gifts: This is music for taking down the tree. But as the best of these indie covers, stabs at standards and occasional originals prove, there's nothing wrong with a little sad-sack holiday schmaltz. Arty NYC trio Ivy sensuously warp "Christmas Time Is Here" from *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, and Death Cab for Cutie crank up the shimmering melancholy in Phil Spector's "Christmas (Baby Please Come Home)." Even better, Pilate, a Canadian foursome with coed vocals, nail the Pogues' hilarious and heartbreaking "Fairytale of New York." Lisa Loeb breaks the funk with a playful, shuffling "Jingle Bells," reminding us that cornballs can be cheerful, too.

NICK CATUCCI

DOWNLOAD THESE: Pilate "Fairytale of New York," Ivy "Christmas Time Is Here"

HOLLY WILLIAMS

THE ONES WE NEVER KNEW ✪✪✪

UNIVERSAL SOUTH

Southern daughter of a notorious hell-raiser takes her music more seriously

Williams, daughter of the roughneck country star Hank Williams Jr., debuts here as a Nashville ➔

I LOVE THIS CD!

JOE PISCOPO
COMEDIAN ON *SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE*

GAVIN DEGRAW
CHARIOT
J RECORDS

"A lot of these kooky kids today, there's no lyrics and no soul. But Gavin's lyrics are accomplished and his music is heartfelt. Ya gotta see him live!"

From top: Courtesy of Universal; Joseph Marzullo/Retna Ltd.

In their spare time, Sum 41 love obscuring murals.

Paint It Black

After war, Paris Hilton. Canucks are pissed.

SUM 41

CHUCK

★★★

ISLAND

Deryck Whibley has been through a lot since Sum 41's second album. He fended off critics, bloggers, and other haters who insist that his pop-punk foursome are dim Xeroxes of blink-182. On a charity trip to the Congo this summer, he huddled in a hotel bathroom while soldiers fought a militia, rocking the building with shells. And, after Rick Salomon but before Nick Carter, he dated Paris Hilton.

If *Chuck* is any indication, Whibley's come out of at least two of these experiences pissed. Flaunting the kind of serious chops you might find in a Metallica tribute band, Sum 41 put their metal infatuation front-and-center, deep-sixing all things goofy. For every song aimed at making you pogo, four are for throwing devil's horns and performing virgin goat sacrifice: "The Bitter End" has an arpeggiated Iron Maiden-esque solo, "88" paraphrases the thundering breakdown from "Master of Puppets," and the lead single, "We're All to Blame," is a System of a Down-indebted operetta of stop-and-start grinds.

Inflamed by his war experience, Whibley starts out on a snarling campaign against apathy: Targets include complacency ("No Reason"), gluttony ("Super Size our tragedy!" he screams) and himself. Through gritted teeth, he screams, "No one can help me" and "I feel like a prisoner trapped inside this broken world!" If this lean toward Linkin Park self-flagellation feels too familiar, metal bombast provides both drama *and* the album's only trace of humor.

MUSIC FOR VIRGIN GOAT SACRIFICE

The ceaselessly blistering tone does get overbearing. On their 2001 breakout hit "Fat Lip," Sum 41 were *fun*, self-deprecating rather than self-loathing. By their 2002 follow-up album they'd begun their "maturation," but still found time to devote a song to Anna Nicole Smith ("A.N.I.C."). Guys: Where's the Paris dis track?

JONAH WEINER

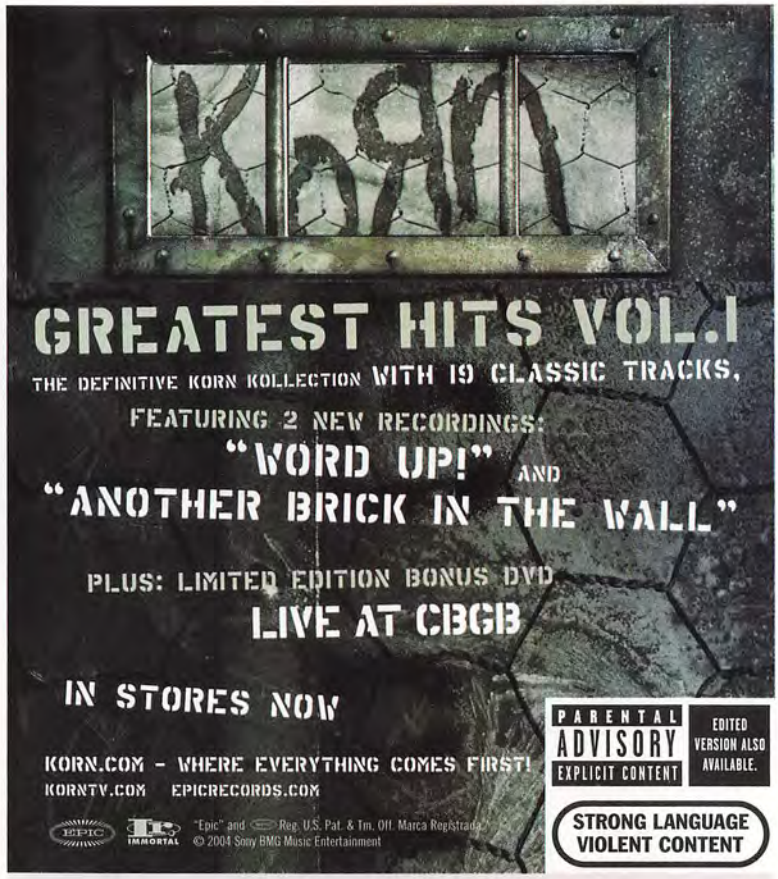
DOWNLOAD THESE: "We're All to Blame," "Pieces"

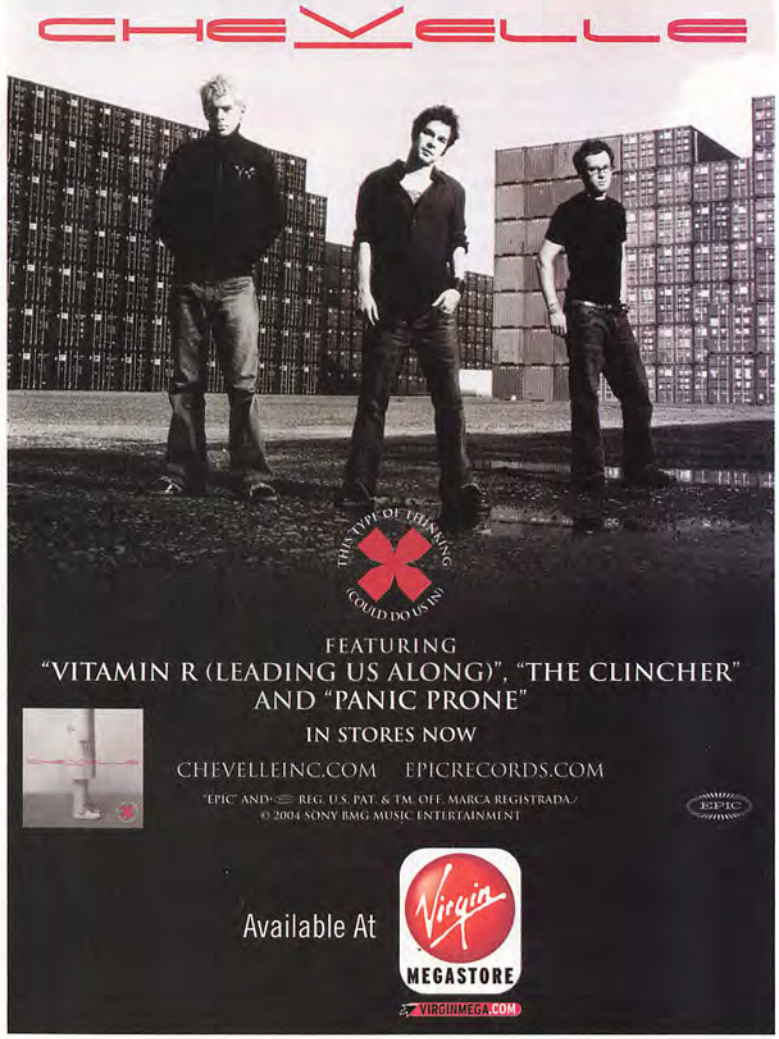
DEREK WHIBLEY'S CURRENT LISTENING:

ELLIOTT SMITH
EITHER/OR *KILL ROCK STARS*

BILLY TALENT
BILLY TALENT *ATLANTIC*

Emily Shur





princess of a kind of music that, done dully, facilitates napping: dead-serious folk-rock trained on thorny matters of the heart. The album is like an HBO series pitched somewhere between the romantic fluttering of *Gilmore Girls* and the sweaty stakes of *CSI*, but Williams makes the merger hers, totally. In delicate passages like the beginning of "Everybody's Waiting for a Change" she sings with flow, strength and polish; her emotions – not her voice – are black-and-blue. But when she nourishes her musings with faster tempos and comfort-food strings, as on "Would You Still Have Fallen," her romantic reporting lacks any real authority.

JAMES HUNTER

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Cheap Parades," "Would You Still Have Fallen"

BRIAN WILSON

SMILE ✪✪✪✪

NONESUCH

Beach Boys' mastermind finishes his masterpiece, 37 years behind schedule

ROCK'S GREATEST UNRELEASED RECORD

In mid-1966, competing with the Beatles, Brian Wilson devoted his then-considerable powers to a mammoth concept album for the Beach Boys, *SMiLE*; a year later, the project collapsed, and he's been picking up the pieces ever since. The damaged shadow-Brian that remains has finally completed it, ditching the Boys' mountain of half-finished tape and recording from scratch with L.A.'s Wondermints (who imitate the original arrangements note-for-note), with only a sprinkling of awkward, newly composed material (featuring words by original lyricist Van Dyke Parks). Despite Wilson's wrecked voice, it's surprisingly grand and moving. The familiar *SMiLE* fragments, placed on later Beach Boys records, flow together into three rippling suites, and these melodies, especially "Surf's Up" and "Wonderful," are the most ravishing he ever wrote.

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Heroes and Villains," "Surf's Up"

TONY JOE WHITE

THE HEROINES ✪✪

SANCTUARY

Author of '70s country-funk hit records a mess of duets with his spiritual daughters

With his tight leather pants, bare midriff, snakey Southern blues and Louisiana drawl, Tony Joe White was the early '70s archetypal swamp stud. His hit "Polk Salad Annie" opened with a thrusty grunt – *umh!* – that even Elvis Presley, in a Vegas-era cover, couldn't match. Decades later, White thinks he's still got it. His first album in six years offers delectable playing: back porch guitar, soul horns, unhurried Delta rhythms. But underneath lurks a Chippendales heart. "Ice Cream Man" and "Robbin' My Honeycomb" work metaphors that were hoary even when he was a pup; duet partner Lucinda Williams forgets the value of subtlety in the overheated clunker "Closing in on the Fire." White's tiger-purr baritone leaves too little to the imagination.

KAREN SCHOEMER

DOWNLOAD THIS: "Can't Go Back Home"

Xzibit's new show? *Pimp My Wallpaper.*

XZIBIT

WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION ✪✪✪

COLUMBIA

L.A. rapper gets angry about politics

Does Michael Moore need rap allies? Beginning his fifth album by rearranging sound bites by President Bush to reveal a plot to "dominate the weak and intimidate the world," Xzibit reinvents himself as a rapper invigorated by current events. He equates America's fighting in the Middle East with a "war on blacks" and tells of a 13-year-old Iraqi whose family, "too broke to move and find shelter," dies together in a bombing ("Cold World"). But it isn't all bad news. On "Muthafucka" – a quick and sexy funk romp that sounds like souped-up Stevie Wonder – the *Pimp My Ride* host is happy to forget bombs and "let the Henny flow."

BEN SISARIO

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Muthafucka"

THE ZOMBIES: COLIN BLUNSTONE AND ROD ARGENT

AS FAR AS I CAN SEE . . . ✪✪

RHINO

Girly-sounding '60s sophisticates back from the dead – ho, ho

A winsome British Invasion group, the Zombies won their record deal in a backwater Battle of the Bands, and hit number two with their debut single "She's Not There." They built jazz-influenced hits on Colin Blunstone's ethereal voice, bowing out with 1968's *Odessey & Oracle*, the best baroque pop album that isn't the Beach Boys' *Pet Sounds*. Here, Blunstone teams with original mate Rod Argent for mawkish power ballads (think Mr. Mister), and Steely-Dan-gone-schmaltz, where a new version of the Blunstone solo hit "I Don't Believe In Miracles" and the moody, luxurious title track stand out. You can never go back, they say, and for once they're right.

TONY POWER

DOWNLOAD THIS: "I Don't Believe In Miracles"

THE ZUTONS

WHO KILLED . . . THE ZUTONS ✪✪✪

EPIC

Freaky Liverpudlians deliver sterling voodoo-garage-funk-pop debut

Four guys and one skronking, sax-playing girl from Liverpool, a hotbed of psychedelic revivalism, the Zutons (rhymes with croutons) more than deliver on the promise of a deranged band name. Their formula is simple: Mix a hodgepodge of influences (Dr. John, old-ska, trashy '60s garage rock, Johnny Cash) with goofy B-movie atmosphere, then turn up the fuzztones.The results – from the garage boogie of "Pressure Point" to the Nashville-on-Mersey weeper "Confusion" – are weird, hook-filled, and irresistible. Abi Harding's saxophone squeaks and bleats in a comically un-sax-like manner, and singer Dave McCabe howls lyrics about zombies, razor-wielding mothers, and "Zuton fever," a malady which causes, among other ghastly symptoms, "flaky skin."

JODY ROSEN

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Zuton Fever," "Confusion," "Nightmare Part II"

BLENDER APPROVED

The best new releases of the last three months

THE COMAS
CONDUCTOR

YEP ROC

Singer Andy Herod's painful split from a famous ex (*Dawson's Creek* star Michelle Williams) inspired this achingly beautiful indie-rock.

DIZZEE RASCAL
SHOWTIME

XL/MATADOR

On album two, Britain's best rapper trades the dark alleys of East London for the even darker alleys of his own reflective mind.

NELLY
SWEAT

FO'REEL/UNIVERSAL

The club-minded yang to *Suit*'s reflective yin, this set sizzles with the St. Louis pleasure hound's melodic funk.

THE USED
IN LOVE AND DEATH

REPRISE

Screamo all-star Bert McCracken lightens up on his band's second album, slipping prettiness into the gloom.

Jonathan Mannion (Xzibit)

LIL JON & THE EAST SIDE BOYZ

CRUNK JUICE

THE NEW ALBUM

INCLUDES **WHAT YOU GON' DO** FEATURING LIL SCRAPPY AND **ROLL CALL** FEATURING ICE CUBE

GUEST ARTISTS INCLUDE R. KELLY, LUDACRIS, T.I., BUN B, SNOOP DOGG, NATE DOGG, TRILLVILLE, 8 BALL AND MJG, NAS, ELEPHANT MAN, BAD BRAINS, YING YANG TWINS, PITBULL AND MORE...

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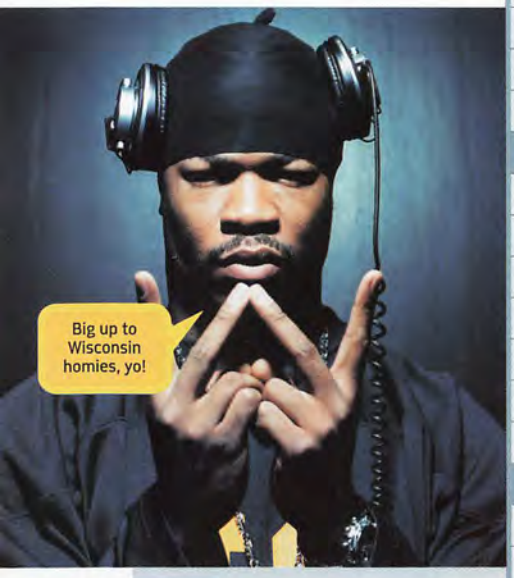
THE

40 MOST POPULAR SONGS IN AMERICA

Teen popstrels take on hip-hop heavyweights in this month's top four.



POSITION	TITLE	ARTIST	ALBUM/LABEL
1	"MY PLACE"	NELLY	*SUIT* FO'REEL/UNIVERSAL
2	"FLY"	HILARY DUFF	*HILARY DUFF* BUENA VISTA/HOLLYWOOD
3	"MY BOO"	USHER FEAT. ALICIA KEYS	*CONFESSIONS* LA FACE
4	"SHADOW"	ASHLEE SIMPSON	*AUTOBIOGRAPHY* GEFFEN
5	"TILT YA HEAD BACK"	NELLY FEAT. CHRISTINA AGUILERA	*SWEAT* FO' REEL/UNIVERSAL
6	"PREDICTABLE"	GOOD CHARLOTTE	*THE CHRONICLES OF LIFE AND DEATH* EPIC
7	"MY HAPPY ENDING"	AVRIL LAVIGNE	*UNDER MY SKIN* ARISTA
8	"SHE WILL BE LOVED"	MAROON 5	*SONGS ABOUT JANE* OCTONE/J RECORDS
9	"MY PREROGATIVE"	BRITNEY SPEARS	*GREATEST HITS: MY PREROGATIVE* JIVE
10	"MUTHAFUCKA"	XZIBIT	*WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION* COLUMBIA
11	"SLOW HANDS"	INTERPOL	*ANTICS* MATADOR
12	"WHITE HOUSES"	VANESSA CARLTON	*HARMONIUM* A&M
13	"FALL TO PIECES"	VELVET REVOLVER	*CONTRABAND* RCA
14	"LET'S GET IT STARTED"	THE BLACK EYED PEAS	*ELEPHUNK* A&M
15	"PIECES OF ME"	ASHLEE SIMPSON	*AUTOBIOGRAPHY* GEFFEN
16	"ONLY ONE"	YELLOWCARD	*OCEAN AVENUE* CAPITOL
17	"JUST LIKE YOU"	THREE DAYS GRACE	*THREE DAYS GRACE* JIVE
18	"BREAKING THE HABIT"	LINKIN PARK	*METEORA* WARNER BROS.
19	"1985"	BOWLING FOR SOUP	*A HANGOVER YOU DON'T DESERVE* JIVE
20	"VITAMIN R (LEADING US ALONG)"	CHEVELLE	*CHEVELLE* EPIC
21	"AMERICAN IDIOT"	GREEN DAY	*AMERICAN IDIOT* REPRISE
22	"SOMEBODY TOLD ME"	THE KILLERS	*HOT FUSS* ISLAND
23	"PAIN"	JIMMY EAT WORLD	*FUTURES* INTERSCOPE
24	"TAKE ME OUT"	FRANZ FERDINAND	*FRANZ FERDINAND* EPIC
25	"ON FIRE"	LLOYD BANKS	*THE HUNGER FOR MORE* G-UNIT/INTERSCOPE
26	"LEAN BACK"	TERROR SQUAD	*TRUE STORY* SRC/UNIVERSAL
27	"COLD"	CROSSFADE	*CROSSFADE* COLUMBIA
28	"GOODIES"	CIARA FEAT. PETEY PABLO	*GOODIES* LA FACE
29	"BROKEN"	SEETHER	*DISCLAIMER 2* WIND-UP
30	"LOCKED UP"	AKON	*TROUBLE* SRC/UNIVERSAL
31	"YOU HAD ME"	JOSS STONE	*MIND, BODY AND SOUL* S-CURVE
32	"HEADSPRUNG"	LL COOL J	*THE DEFINITION* DEF JAM
33	"DISAPPEAR"	HOOBASTANK	*THE REASON* ISLAND
34	"MORE THAN LOVE"	LOS LONELY BOYS	*LOS LONELY BOYS* OR/EPIC
35	"MR. BRIGHTSIDE"	THE KILLERS	*HOT FUSS* ISLAND
36	"ON THE WAY DOWN"	RYAN CABRERA	*TAKE IT ALL THE WAY* E.V.L.A./ ATLANTIC
37	"A FAVOR HOUSE ATLANTIC"	COHEED AND CAMBRIA	*IN KEEPING SECRETS...* EQUAL VISION/COLUMBIA
38	"NO PHONE"	CAKE	*PRESSURE CHIEF* COLUMBIA
39	"FLOAT ON"	MODEST MOUSE	*GOOD NEWS FOR PEOPLE WHO LOVE BAD NEWS* EPIC
40	"DIARY"	ALICIA KEYS	*THE DIARY OF ALICIA KEYS* J RECORDS

10 XZIBIT

"MUTHAFUCKA"

WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

He's the most gangsta auto-customizer since that guy who said, "You're not gonna pay a lot for this muffler!" This hit is a reminder that, oh yeah, Xzibit makes music, too. This fall, he's filming his parts in the sequel to Vin Diesel's *XXX*. Catch him on *Last Call With Carson Daly* next month.

HOW WE DID IT

The Most Popular Songs chart is based on radio and video airplay and album sales. Provided by HITSDailyDouble.com: "Proof that any idiot in the music business can have a Web site."

19 BOWLING FOR SOUP

"1985"

A HANGOVER YOU DON'T DESERVE

Self-proclaimed "fat guys from Texas," these power-pop noodniks return with a follow-up to their Grammy-nominated "Girl All the Bad Guys Want." The video for "1985" has been added to MTV, MTV2, VH1 and Fuse. Fresh off the Warped Tour, they'll tour the U.K. this month.

27 CROSSFADE

"COLD"

CROSSFADE

Carrying on Creed's arena-grunge tradition, Crossfade follow up its modern-rock hit "Starless" with an apology ballad. Last month, they played it for Conan O'Brien. This month, they pair with Alter Bridge to tour the U.S., from Corpus Christi, Texas, through Spokane, Washington.

31 JOSS STONE

"YOU HAD ME"

MIND, BODY AND SOUL

"I don't want to be walked all over – no woman does," Joss Stone says of the thinking behind this ex-dissing smash. With her second CD, the soul-stress goes from sultry lounge act to revved-up hellcat. She's live on VH1's *Inside Track* this month. In November, she'll tour the U.K.

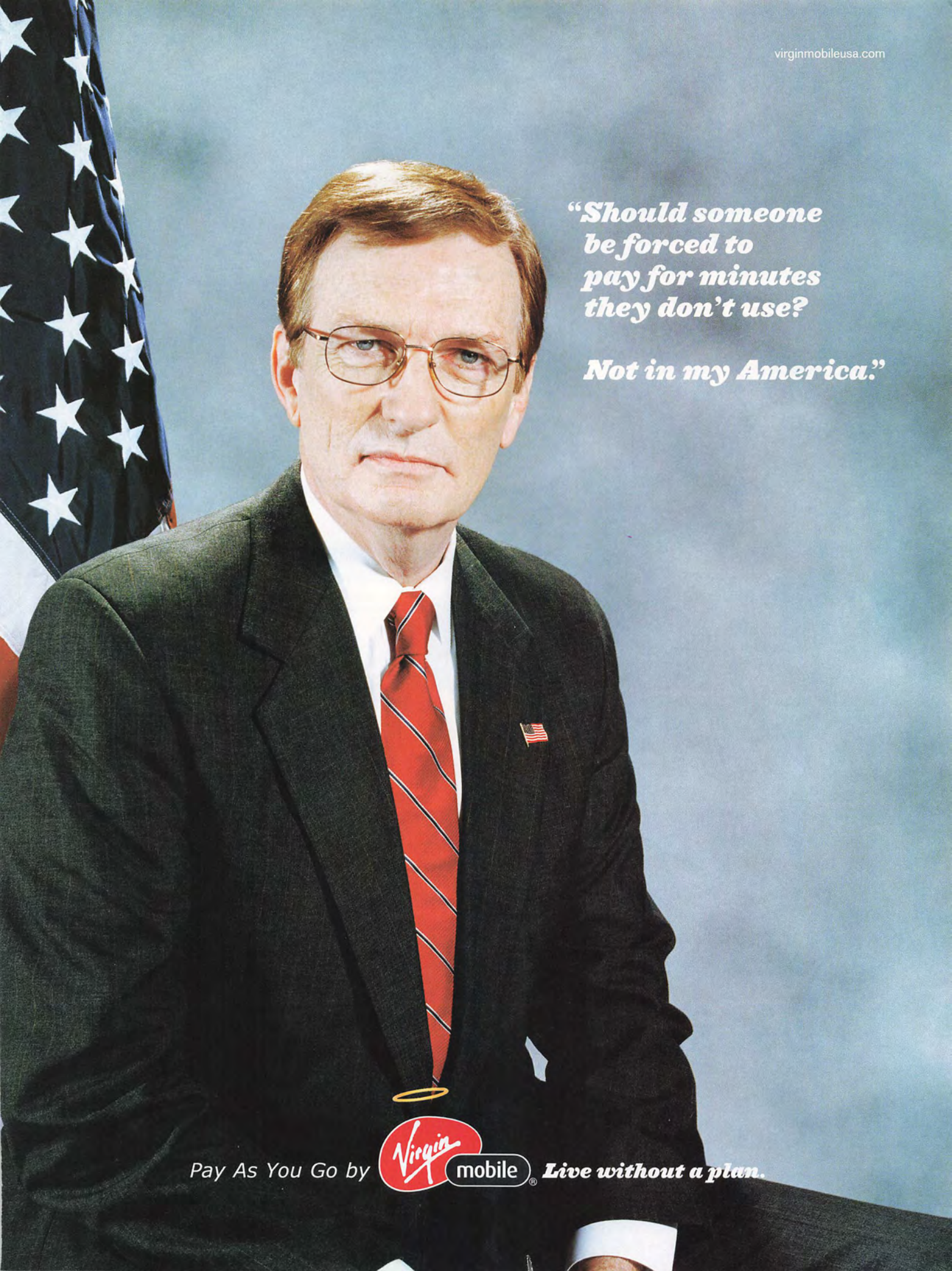
THE 10 MOST POPULAR RING TONES IN AMERICA

Did Alexander Graham Bell invent the telephone for this? Yes!

1 "ON FIRE"	LLOYD BANKS
2 "SUNSHINE"	LIL' FLIP
3 "LOCKED UP"	AKON
4 "GOODIES"	CIARA FEAT. PETEY PABLO
5 "NO PROBLEM"	LIL SCRAPPY
6 "YEAH!"	USHER
7 "FREEK-A-LEEK"	PETEY PABLO
8 "VOODOO"	GODSMACK
9 "WELCOME BACK"	MASE
10 "JESUS WALKS"	KANYE WEST

SOURCE: VIRGIN MOBILE

Clockwise from left: Dan Kulu/Vanit/Retna Ltd.; Courtesy of Jive Records; Courtesy of FG Records; Roger Moenks


virginmobileusa.com
"Should someone be forced to pay for minutes they don't use?
Not in my America."
Pay As You Go by Virgin mobile
Live without a plan.

"Spread your chickens!"

So says Michel Gondry, the wacky French genius behind *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* and the White Stripes' "Lego" video. (No, we're not sure what he means, either.)

BY VICTORIA DeSILVERIO
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ETHAN HILL

THE CD THAT MAKES ME THINK OF MY CYCLE

BJÖRK

DEBUT

ELEKTRA, 1993

"Guys have cycles too, and sometimes, we feel feverish and we don't know why. When I heard this album for the first time, I was in the subway in Paris and I was wearing an orange jacket and feeling feverish. I was feeling very anxious – I wanted to make a video with her because each song inspired me, but also because I wanted to keep in touch with her. It's not every day you meet someone with a brain like hers."

THE CD TO GET STUCK IN TRAFFIC TO

N.E.R.D.

FLY OR DIE

VIRGIN, 2004

"I was in a car on my way to do the *Charlie Rose Show* and I asked the driver to play this. When 'Wonderful Place' came on, the driver, who was in his 60s, and a publicist both caught the beat. We were in traffic, but we didn't care because we were having such a happy moment! We played that song 10 times, and when we arrived, I gave the driver my copy. He was happy to hear music from younger people he could really dig."

THE CD THAT REMINDS ME OF FARTING

MICHAEL JACKSON

HISTORY: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE, BOOK 1

EPIC, 1995

"At 2 A.M. every night during holidays, my brother and I sat on his bed to watch TV with a remote control made out of a broomstick. I'd go under the covers and fart, coughing to cover the noise, and he would get upset. The program *Bonsoir le clip* showed videos: That's where I saw videos for Michael Jackson's 'Bad' and 'Billie Jean.' In terms of music, he's a genius and way above everyone else."

THE CD THAT MAKES ME FEEL YOUNG AGAIN

ARIEL RAMÍREZ

MISA CRIOLLA

PHILIPS, 1990

"My mom played this choir music when I was a kid. It's from Argentina. The voices are very homogeneous. Their hearts are all on the same wavelength. It's an odd record that Björk and I both see as being very influential. When I hear it, I remember being young and feeling good. Religion creates the most horrifying events in the world, but also the most beautiful, creative and pure. For me, this album illustrates that."

THE CD THAT MAKES ME FEEL WHITE

MISSY ELLIOTT

THIS IS NOT A TEST!

GOLD MIND/ELEKTRA, 2003

"The first and last time I met her was at the Beverly Hills Hotel. She was in the gym. I was on the rowing machine and she was on the bicycle – just kidding! For a video, she wanted me to create a 3D effect that involved people wearing those glasses. Very impractical! So, by the time I figured out another idea, she was working with Hype Williams. This happens all the time in hip-hop. It's very hard to break into the entourage."

THE CD I THOUGHT I WOULD HATE

RAY CHARLES

WISH YOU WERE HERE TONIGHT

COLUMBIA, 1983

"I was at the FNAC, a big retail store in France, looking for a new Charles record. You choose for the cover, and he was looking good on this one, so I got it. When I got home, I realized it was country music. I was so disappointed! But eventually, it became one of my favorites. It is so slow, you can hear every grain of sand of the texture of his voice. His voice has a bitterness that is addictive."

THE CD RHYMING "CHICKENS" WITH "DICKENS"

IAN DURY & THE BLOCKHEADS

SEX & DRUGS & ROCK & ROLL: THE BEST . . .

RHINO, 1992

"He is a true funk man and his orchestra are the true funk. His voice is very human, and when I was young, I liked his odd sense of humor: 'Spread your chickens when you think of next, what the Dickens if they're highly sexed?' I don't know what that means, but I like it! I think he redeemed himself at the end of his career– he didn't sing so much about drugs, which I don't like necessarily."

THE CD THAT MAKES ME THINK OF MUSTACHES

PEACHES

FATHERFUCKER

XL, 2003

"When I heard Peaches's *Fatherfucker*, I imagined a salesman with a mustache who puts a briefcase on a table and out pops a girl who looks like him. She walks over to a table next to him, opens her own case and another salesman pops out! The word 'fatherfucker' is so satisfying to the ear. Peaches says the dirtiest things, and she's still pure. There is this happiness in her that isn't cynical."

THE CD THAT MAKES DEATH SEEM LESS SCARY

TALKING HEADS

REMAIN IN LIGHT

SIRE, 1980

"When this came out, I was in art school and it was the beginning of the Walkman craze. I can remember each little bit playing on my headset – the stereo on this album is totally amazing. It was before they used a lot of drum machines. There is a lot about death and decay in their lyrics. I'm scared of death but on this album, there is something serene about it. This album puts my cells in loops in the same direction!"

THE CD FOR WALLOWING IN SADNESS

BECK

SEA CHANGE

INTERSCOPE, 2002

"Beck makes such beautiful music when he's sad. This record is about the aftermath of a break-up with his girlfriend. When it came out, I had a break-up with my girlfriend, so these songs were very meaningful for me. The way he described his new record [out 2005] to me, the music seems more uplifting. I can't wait to hear it!"

→ Michel Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* is now out on DVD.

AND MORE . . .

ALPHA PEPPER AUDIO BULLYS EGO WAR **THE BEATLES** *YELLOW SUBMARINE* SOUNDTRACK **BECK** MIDNITE VULTURES **THE BETA BAND** THE 3 EPS **JANE BIRKIN** À LA LÉGÈRE **BJÖRK** MEDULLA **BLAKE & MORTIMER** LA MARQUE JAUNE **CLAUDE BOLLING** *LUCKY LUKE* ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK **BOOKER T & THE M.G.'S** MELTING POT **BENJAMIN BRITTEN** THE SYMPHONY OF CAROLS **ETIENNE CHARRY** 36 ERREURS **CHIC** RISQUÉ **SANDRINE COLLARD** JE COMMUNIQUE **PAOLO CONTE** UNA FACCIA IN PRESTITO **LOUIS DE FUNÈS** CONTEUR ACTEUR PENSEUR CHANTEUR **NEIL DIAMOND** THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION **FRANCESCO DE MASI** MUSIQUE DE FILMS **DIZZEE RASCAL** BOY IN DA CORNER **DOCTOR ROCKIT** INDOOR FIREWORKS **DR. OCTAGON** DR. OCTAGONECOLOGYST **DUKE ELLINGTON** THIS IS JAZZ, VOL. 7 **MORTON FELDMAN** ROTHKO CHAPEL **BRYAN FERRY** SLAVE TO LOVE **SERGENT GARCIA** UN POQUITO QUEMA'O **GITANE JAZZ** ORGUE **GLENN GOULD** THE COMPOSER **SCREAMIN' JAY HAWKINS** I PUT A SPELL ON YOU **GEORGE HARRISON** ALL THINGS MUST PASS **BERNARD HERRMANN** *CITIZEN KANE* ORIGINAL SCORE **IBRAHIM FERRER** IBRAHIM FERRER **RICK JAMES** THE BEST OF RICK JAMES **JESUS LOVES YOU** SWEET TOXIC LOVE **JET** GET BORN **ANTONIO CARLOS JOBIM AND ELIS REGINA** ELIS & TOM **CHAKA KHAN** I FEEL FOR YOU **KINGS OF CONVENIENCE** VERSUS **THE KINKS** THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION **MARK KOSTABI** SONGS FOR SUMERA **LE TONE** PLAYLIST **CLAUDINE LONGET** CUDDLE UP WITH CLAUDINE LONGET **MASSIVE ATTACK** BLUE LINES **GIANCARLO MENOTTI** THE MEDIUM **THELONIOUS MONK** MONK'S BLUES **MOVING UNITS** MOVING UNITS **MU-ZIQ** BRACE YOURSELF **WILLIE NELSON** TEATRO **RANDY NEWMAN** LITTLE CRIMINALS **SINÉAD O'CONNOR** UNIVERSAL MOTHER **CHARLIE PARKER** SAVOY JAZZ **PHOENIX** UNITED **WILSON PICKETT** WILSON PICKETT **THE POSTAL SERVICE** GIVE UP **RATATAT** RATATAT **RJD2** THE HORROR **RJD2** DEADRINGER **TERRY RILEY** IN C **CARINA ROUND** THE DISCONNECTION **RUFFA** A DIAMOND IN THE RUFF **FAZIL SAY** BLACK EARTH **TURIN BRAKES** ETHER SONG **THE WHITE STRIPES** ELEPHANT **VAR. ARTISTS** THRILLERS: GREAT MOVIE SUSPENSE HITS **WILEY** TREDDIN' ON THIN ICE **NEIL YOUNG** NEIL YOUNG **YOUNG MC** STONE COLD RHYMIN' **ZAP MAMA** À MA ZONE

Grooming by Patricia Longo

Piercing!

In their first 10 years, Korn invented rap-rock — then got bored

KORN
GREATEST HITS VOL. 1
✪✪✪
EPIC

Long before they were established as founding fathers of rap-rock, one of the '90s' most successful (and most widely loathed) genres, Korn were five bandmates in Bakersfield, California, who shared a common obsession: ugliness.

Singer Jonathan Davis saw it everywhere — in friends and girlfriends, in political speeches and childhood stories, in himself. More importantly, Korn heard it everywhere, too: in the murky, paranoid hip-hop of Cypress Hill, in the elegant and precise diatribes of Nine Inch Nails, in the mathematical stomps of Helmet.

The band's first retrospective, *Greatest Hits Vol. 1*, runs in reverse-chronological order: Thick, swaggering new songs like "Y'all Want a Single" (an attack on corporate radio, among other things) give way to skinny, paranoid old ones. Listening to the songs in this order makes it sound like the band was losing the plot, when really they were finding it.

It's not until near the end that you hear "Shoots and Ladders," from their 1994 self-titled debut, which sums up the ambition and silliness of early, messy Korn. For over a minute, all you hear is bagpipes. The band arrives, one giant rhythm section with guitars lurching and moaning, and then Davis starts reciting nursery rhymes — ugly ones, of course. "Ring around the rosies, pockets full of posies," he intones, singing lyrics with origins in the bubonic plague of the 17th century. When he snarls, "Look at the pages that cause all this evil," he sounds more impressed than disgusted.

Although Korn inspired an entire generation of baggy-panted metalheads with bad lyrics and worse flow, this collection shows that Davis's best songs were the opposite of rap-rock, laying his goth-influenced croak atop his band's chunky hip-hop riffs. (One wildly entertaining exception is "Twist," a minute-long exhibition of death-metal beatboxing from 1996's *Life Is Peachy*.)

By 1998, limpbizkit had begun its swift voyage from obscurity to infamy. Amused (or maybe irritated) by the viral spread of rap-rock, Korn released *Follow the Leader*, their most coherent album so far, which included one of their biggest hits, "Got the Life." Davis jabbers away in defiance and despair, and Fieldy plays a propulsive bassline (you almost don't hear any notes, just a gluey rumble) while drummer David Silveria gives the chorus an unexpected disco beat — few '90s hard-rock bands could cram this many ideas into a radio hit.

FEW BANDS CRAM SO MANY IDEAS INTO A RADIO HIT.

There's something radical about Korn's singleminded approach — the band's guitarists, Brian "Head" Welch and James "Munky" Shaffer, concentrate on quick (or excruciatingly slow) eruptions of white noise instead of riffs. But the formula can be tiresome, and Davis's often ridiculous lyrics ("Make Me Bad," from 1999's *Issues*, begins with him saying, "I am watching the rise and fall of my salvation") blur the line between self-loathing and self-parody.

That's why Korn's 2002 album, *Untouchables*, was such a welcome surprise: an expansive, often beautiful CD that *should* have been the band's "Black Album," moving them from arenas to stadiums. It wasn't: Longtime fans were irritated by the huge choruses and freaky new-wave, and lots of mainstream listeners couldn't see past the band's (increasingly misleading) rap-rock reputation.

Still, this collection includes a pair of *Untouchables* tracks, including "Alone I Break," where Davis shivers and spits over a spooky electronic breakbeat. By comparison, the songs from 2003's back-to-basics disc *Take a Look In the Mirror* seem loud but predictable.

The collection starts off with a couple of new songs, both covers. The band's seven-minute version of Pink Floyd's "Another Brick In the Wall" doesn't sound much better than you might think it would, but the romp through Cameo's 1986 synth-funk hit "Word Up" has a certain giddy charm, not least because all the loathing and noise are gone. For three minutes, Korn sounds like one of the many loud but radio-friendly bands who have ripped them off.

KELEFA SANNEH

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Word Up," "Alone I Break," "Got the Life"

Korn, from left: James Shaffer, David Silveria, Jonathan Davis, Reginald "Fieldy" Arvizu and Brian Welch

From left: Courtesy of Epic Records; Anthony Mandler/Corbis Outline

THE SCORE »

✪✪✪✪✪
EXCELLENT. A MUST-HAVE

✪✪✪✪
GREAT. CHECK IT OUT

✪✪✪
GOOD IN ITS GENRE

✪✪
JUST OK

✪
WEAK

ALBERT AYLER

HOLY GHOST ✪✪✪✪

REVENANT

Gala nine-CD set celebrates the career of an avant-garde jazz legend

A virtuoso saxophonist whose solos went from a whisper to a shriek, Albert Ayler seemed born to the chaotic caterwauling of free jazz. Yet his music also maintained a strong, almost folk-like melodic quality, and there was something spiritual in the questing drama of his performances. Drawing mainly from unreleased and obscure recordings, *Holy Ghost* covers the full span of Ayler's recorded career, from early sides with the Army band to a concert mere months before his mysterious death by drowning in 1970. Although the music is often stunning, there are some major stumbles, including an inept attempt at R&B from 1968. Even so, it's hard to imagine a better overview of such a singular artist.

J.D. CONSIDINE

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Love Cry/Truth Is Marching In/Our Prayer," "Zion Hill"

THE BEAKERS

FOUR STEPS TOWARD A CULTURAL REVOLUTION ✪✪

K RECORDS

The artistic ancestors of the Rapture and !!! were influential, but that doesn't always mean "good"

A quarter-century ago, art students dug James Brown and played "skronk" – repetitive, "funky" bass, skittering drums, slashing guitar and a singer spouting cryptic alienation while dancing spastically. Enter pioneering Northwest indie quartet the Beakers, whose year-long career began in early 1980. *Four Steps Toward a Cultural Revolution*, a compilation of crudely recorded singles and unreleased tracks, apes skronk kings Gang of Four and Talking Heads, only without the former's ferocity or the latter's songwriting. Their synapse-misfiring saxophone was novel, but singer Mark Smith was a shameless David Byrne ringer, rendering this a period piece. Still, having depleted the '80s post-punk pantheon, hipsters crave new old blood like this. "Look to the past for new ideas!" Smith hollers on "Thinking Postmodern." Clearly, he knew something.

MICHAEL AZERRAD

DOWNLOAD THIS: "Funky Town"

Tony Bennett: So *that's* who stole Bono's glasses!

TONY BENNETT

FIFTY YEARS: THE ARTISTRY OF TONY BENNETT ✪✪✪✪✪

RPM/COLUMBIA

Though never as big as Sinatra, he's the greatest living lounge singer – and his toupée is hysterical!

Tony Bennett is a good-will ambassador from another era, making friendly overtures to the rock generation. This definitive five-CD anthology follows his evolution from an Italian-American crooner off the streets of Queens, to a husky-voiced swinger of popular standards, then – since the death of Frank Sinatra – the grandfatherly guardian of old-fashioned American music. On initial early-'50s hits, such as "Because of You" and "Stranger In Paradise," the voice was a honey-dripping throb. By 1962, when "I Left My Heart In San Francisco" rekindled his career, the pleading balladeer had evolved into a suave nostalgist. In recent duets with Ray Charles, k.d. lang and Diana Krall, he's an endearing elder

Hair today...

A British guitarist goes from hippie freak to classicist shuffler

CREAM

DISRAELI GEARS (DELUXE EDITION) ✪✪✪✪

POLYDOR

ERIC CLAPTON

461 OCEAN BOULEVARD (DELUXE EDITION) ✪✪

POLYDOR

HOW MUCH CAN a musician change in seven years? The Eric Clapton who was Cream's guitarist in 1967 and the Clapton who made *461 Ocean Boulevard* in 1974 are as different as the wide-open 1960s and the recession-ridden 1970s. The former eagerly embraced possibilities, the latter renounced any hint of excess. What connects the two is a sense of the blues as tragedy.

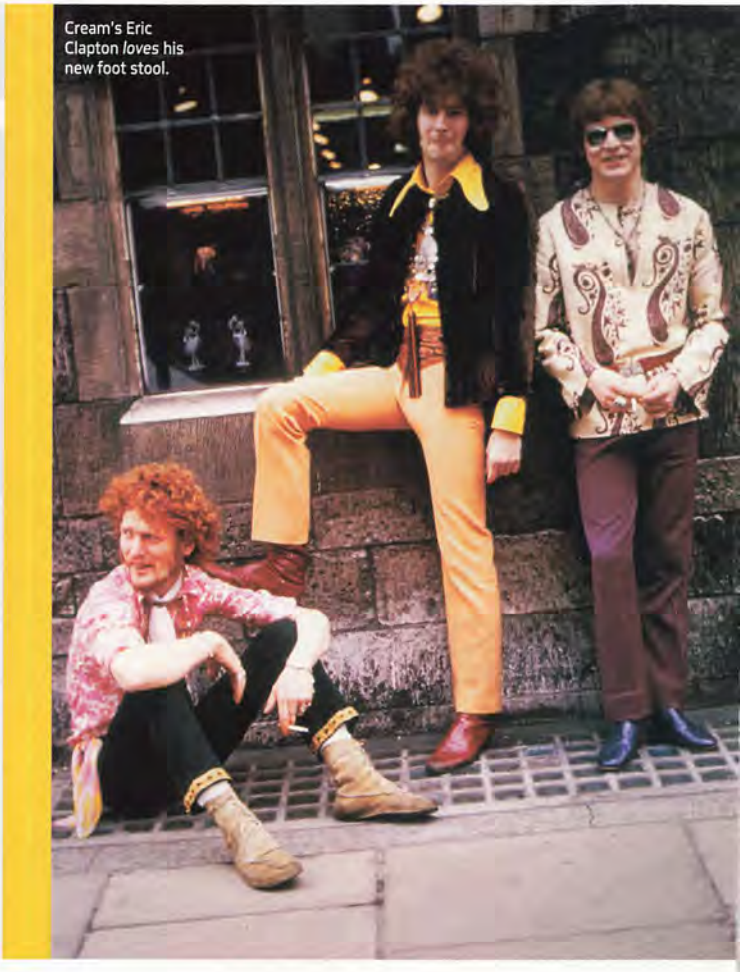
Disraeli Gears is the work of three giant egos: Clapton, art-rock bassist Jack Bruce, and drummer Ginger Baker, knocking around the beat. The record starts by warping 12-bar blues into imagistic jams, detours into psychedelic ballads and wah-wah rockers, and touches down again in the blues. For all the musical camaraderie, songs are steeped in despair; titles like "World of Pain" and "We're Going Wrong" aren't kidding. *Disraeli*'s Deluxe Edition is padded with a mono mix, but also has demos and songs recorded live by the BBC, with authentic hokey DJ patter.

Clapton made *461* after shaking heroin addiction, and he sounds chastened and haunted. He concentrates on jaunty Caribbean- and country-tinged grooves rather than lead guitar; his voice is bleak and nearly submerged, with an unresolved ache.

The album's hit, "I Shot the Sheriff," now sounds more like a copy of Bob Marley's original; the gem is "Let It Grow," which yearns for love with "Stairway to Heaven" chords. *461*'s Deluxe Edition adds a concert set that gradually perks up, almost in spite of Clapton's reticence.

JON PARELES

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Sunshine of Your Love" (*Disraeli Gears*), "Let It Grow" (*461 Ocean Boulevard*)



Cream's Eric Clapton *loves* his new foot stool.

Can: "Wait, Calais's in friggin' *France*?"

statesman in supreme command, ebulliently tending that flame.
STEPHEN HOLDEN
DOWNLOAD THESE: "Blue Velvet,""What a Wonderful World" (feat. k.d. lang)

CAN

MONSTER MOVIE ✪✪✪
SOUNDTRACKS ✪✪✪
TAGO MAGO ✪✪✪
EGE BAMYASI ✪✪✪✪

MUTE

A four-pack of venerable but exhilarating Krautrock groove things

Starting in 1967, German improv-rock band Can investigated spacey funk, Eastern grooves and other surging styles that still sound prescient. The Cologne quintet's musical lab experiments became major influences on British post-punkers Public Image Ltd. and the Fall, one of whose songs invokes Can singer Damo Suzuki. That Japanese-born oddball chants atop the cold-blooded Teutonbeat on three of these four albums, originally released in 1969–72 and now crisply remastered. The Velvets-grounded "Father Cannot Yell" opens *Monster Movie*, introducing the band's distinctive locomotion. *Soundtracks*, which compiles Can film music, peaks with the churning epic "Mother Sky." The free-form *Tago Mago* coheres for the smoldering "Mushroom." And *Ege Bamyasi* is the most hypnotic disc, with such early ambient tone poems as "One More Night," chilled-out murmuring with an inextinguishable fire.
MARK JENKINS
DOWNLOAD THESE: "Father Cannot Yell," "Mother Sky," "Mushroom," "One More Night"

CRIME

SAN FRANCISCO'S STILL DOOMED ✪✪✪

SWAMI

Rethrashing the '70s with the S.F. band who taught Hippieville to sneer

While they declined to call themselves "punk," Crime did set out to shred what was left of the flowers in San Francisco music's hair. Billing itself as the town's "first and only rock & roll band," the quartet released two abrasive, lo-fi singles, 1976's "Hot Wire My Heart" (great B-side title, "Baby, You're So Repulsive") and 1977's "Frustration." This retrospective is an Iggyesque 22-song bender, with occasional forays into rockabilly and funk. The swinging "Monkey On Your Back" toys with a new, bass-driven direction, while the minimalist momentum of "Rock 'n' Roll Enemy No. 1" anticipates Sonic Youth (who later covered "Hot Wire"). But there was no future in Crime, the sort of band which exists only to blurt a few timeless tirades.
MARK JENKINS
DOWNLOAD THESE: "Frustration," "Rock 'n' Roll Enemy No. 1"

BOBBY DARIN

THE LEGENDARY BOBBY DARIN ✪✪✪✪

CAPITOL

ACES BACK TO BACK ✪✪✪✪

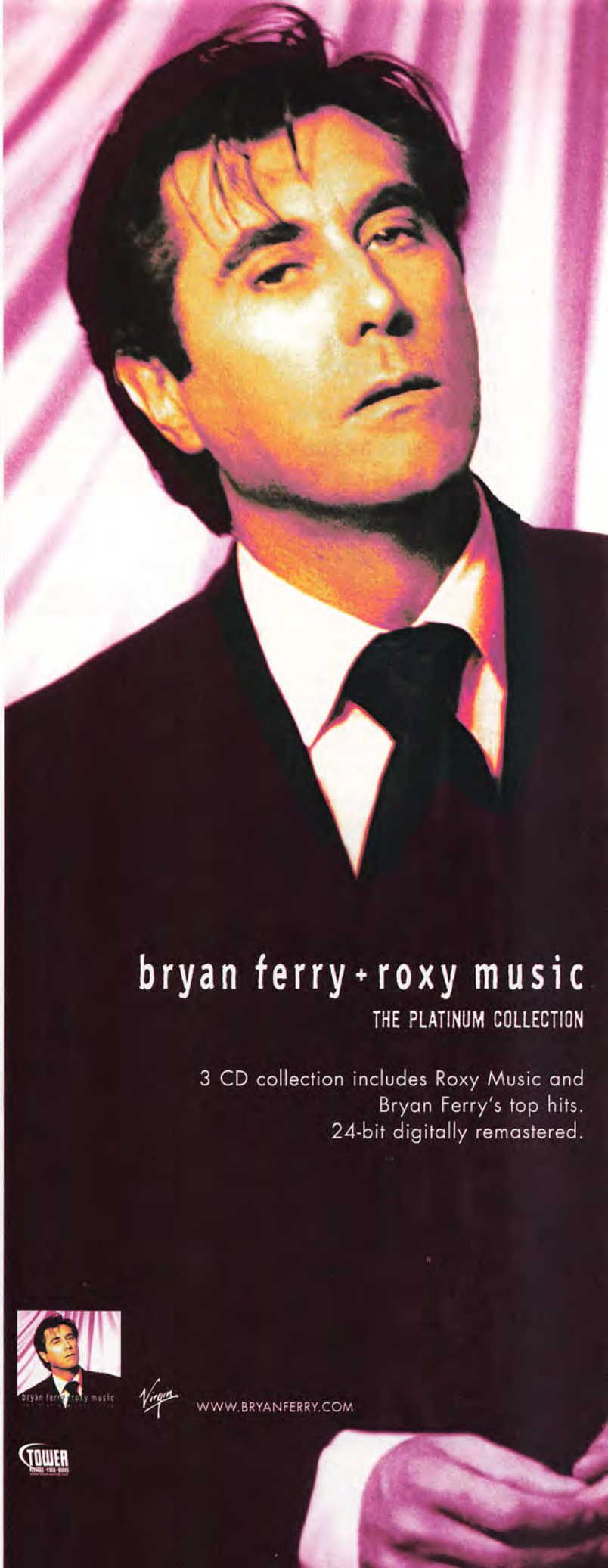
HYENA

He overcame teen stardom, died at 37, and always swung hard

ONE OF POP'S GREATEST SINGERS!

In the tradition of Janis Joplin, Sid Vicious and Loretta Lynn, Bobby Darin revivalism has arrived. A biopic starring Kevin Spacey is coming from Hollywood; in the meantime, two retrospectives prove Darin was more than just the guy who took a blustery hep-cat version of "Mack the Knife" to the top of the charts. He began his career in the late '50s singing cheery pap ("Splish Splash"), but soon found a niche in stylish lounge-pop with a rich, round baritone and taste that ran from standards to folk-rock. These CDs, packed with rarities and live tracks, showcase Darin's range and charm: Whether huffing his signature tune "Beyond the Sea" or Bob Dylan's "I'll Be Your Baby Tonight," ➔

Opposite page, from top: Courtesy of Sony Legacy; Govert De Roos/LFI. This page: Thomas Hesterberg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he turned every song into soul music, singing with panache, deep feeling and a fierce sense of swing.
JODY ROSEN

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Moon River," "You're the Reason I'm Living," "Oh! Look At Me Now"

BRIAN ENO

DISCREET MUSIC ✪✪✪

AMBIENT 1: MUSIC FOR AIRPORTS ✪✪✪✪

AMBIENT 4: ON LAND ✪✪✪

ENO & HAROLD BUDD

AMBIENT 2: THE PLATEAUX OF MIRROR ✪✪

ASTRALWERKS

Brit genius invents "ambient music," clears the way for Yanni

LIKE JOHN TESH. BUT GREAT.

To say these albums are easy to ignore is a compliment: Pop conceptualist and future U2 producer Brian Eno intended them to be played so quietly they'd merely "tint" their surroundings. *Discreet Music*, from 1975, is a pair of smart, chilly experiments — not compositions, but "process" pieces, executed according to rules. (The second half unnervingly mutates Pachelbel's 17th-century warhorse "Canon in D.") *Music for Airports* ran counter to the punk spirit of most of Eno's 1978 work — four long, looping piano pieces, perpetually in motion but going nowhere in particular — but it's the beginning of ambient music as we know it. The most ambitious of these, 1982's *On Land*, is a melody-free set of acoustic environments — the ambient noise of imaginary outdoor spaces. *The Plateaux of Mirror*, a 1980 collaboration with pianist Harold Budd, lacks an unsettling depth, and shows how readily Eno's invention can be turned into new-age fluff.
DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD THESE: "1/1," "The Lost Day"

EVERCLEAR

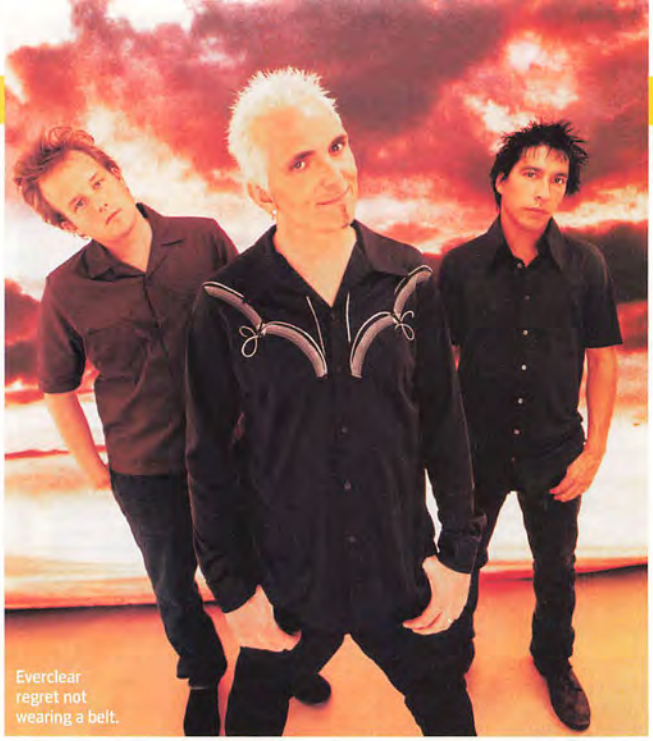
TEN YEARS GONE: THE BEST OF EVERCLEAR, 1994–2004 ✪✪✪

CAPITOL

Pacific Northwest post-grungers package sparkling hits with humdrum misses

Almost as soon as detractors charged that Everclear weren't authentically grunge, singer-songwriter Art Alexakis proved them right. From such early rave-ups as "Santa Monica," which tempered Nirvana-like crescendos with lyrical guitar, the Portland, Oregon, trio shifted to more pop-oriented fare like "AM Radio." Those two songs and 19 others are included on this over-generous retrospective, which recaps a decade of grim autobiographical vignettes ("Father of Mine," "Heroin Girl") while illustrating the limitations of Alexakis's formula: Too many of these songs attach an over-insistent circular riff (or sample) to near-interchangeable ascending choruses. A pair of previously unreleased songs, as well as two tracks rescued from soundtrack albums, add little to Everclear's legacy.
MARK JENKINS

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Santa Monica," "AM Radio"



Everclear regret not wearing a belt.

05:45
> JAMES'S CLASS BEGINS
05:47
> JAMES PARACHUTES INTO ALLIGATOR-INFESTED SWAMP
> GET THE BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER
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A DAY IN THE LIFE OF AN ARMY OF ONE
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Janis Joplin: Just happy to be here, high.

GRATEFUL DEAD

BEYOND DESCRIPTION (1973–1989) ✪✪✪

RHINO

Yep, the latter-day Dead were as terrific – or as tedious – as you always thought they were

This 12-CD box of overkill contains the Grateful Dead's final 10 albums, from *Wake of the Flood* (1973) to *Built to Last* (1989), accompanied by hours and hours of outtakes and recordings of them performing live. Though the Dead's output declined steadily from the self-released excellence of the earthy *Wake* and experimentally assertive *Blues for Allah* (where every cricket chirp is enhanced in its remastering) to their bedraggled final efforts, highlights aplenty remain. These include *Terrapin Station*'s instrumental outtakes of "Peggy-O" and "The Ascent," and *Allah*'s casually inventive studio jams. The bonus CDs accompanying the acoustic *Reckoning* and electric *Dead Set* live albums recorded in 1980, though, are relatively lackluster additions to the canon of a band that refused to be reasonable.

RICHARD GEHR

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Eyes of the World" (live), "Blues for Allah," "Foolish Heart" (live)

JANIS JOPLIN

PEARL (LEGACY EDITION) ✪✪✪✪

COLUMBIA/LEGACY

Buy this blues-rock oldie and get a free live album!

Because Joplin overdosed on heroin shortly before the record's 1971 release, there has always been a patina of tragedy to *Pearl*. It includes her catchiest and most enduring songs – "Move Over," "Mercedes Benz" and the chart-topping "Me & Bobby McGee" – and marks a huge step forward from the rambling self-indulgence of her first two albums. This edition shows how she got there, both through alternate versions (including an unexpectedly sweet, coffeehouse-style demo for "Bobby McGee") and a concert recording made three months before she died. Drawn from the tour documented in *Festival Express*, the live tracks are themselves worth the price of admission, catching Joplin at her most focused and personable.

J.D. CONSIDINE

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Me & Bobby McGee" (demo), "Move Over," "Piece of My Heart" (live)

KANSAS

SAIL ON: THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION ✪✪

EPIC/LEGACY

Hairy arena rockers celebrate three decades of mediocrity

A 30-year lifespan sounds impressive, but for Kansas, the last 20 don't really count (only five of the 27 tracks here were recorded after 1983). Emerging in 1974 as a progressive boogie outfit that bludgeoned songs with aimless synth swirls and interminable violin solos, Kansas were just another band of wankers with long beards ➔

I LOVE THIS CD!

HAL SPARKS
ACTOR IN *QUEER AS FOLK*, VH1'S *I LOVE THE 80S*

ZAKK WYLDE'S BLACK LABEL SOCIETY THE BLESSED HELLRIDE *SPITFIRE*

"That thing fuckin' smokes. I'm a huge Zakk Wylde fan, and Ozzy Osbourne does a guest vocal on 'Stillborn,' which is spectacular."

Opposite page: Chapman Baehler. This page, from top: Courtesy of Sony Legacy; Ed Geller/Retna Ltd.

HIS LEGEND BEGAN HERE.

2 DVD VIDEO

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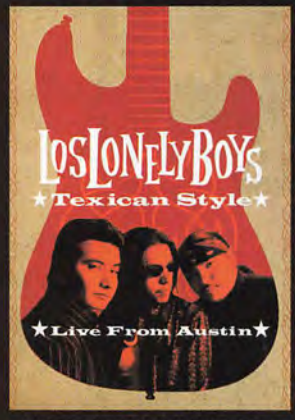

DVD VIDEO

LOS LONELY BOYS
TEXICAN STYLE
"LIVE FROM AUSTIN"

Texican Style captures the band's historic performance to over 25,000 fans in Spring 2004 – Austin's biggest concert ever. Performances include "Heaven" and songs from their Platinum-selling debut CD as well as previously unreleased songs. Bonus features: interviews, a tour of the boys' hometown and more.

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TOWER RECORDS
Tower.com

"Epic," "Legacy" and ■, Reg. U.S. Pat. & Tm. Off. Marca Registrada © 2004 Sony BMG Music Entertainment.

and a geographic moniker – until they realized the benefits of trimming the prog fat. By the mid-'70s they'd crafted a pair of cosmic but cool anthems that rode the arena-rock zeitgeist ("Carry On Wayward Son," "Point of Know Return"). They hit their own point of no return after 1978's mawkish-but-huge "Dust In the Wind," and they've coasted on their brief heyday ever since.

ERIK HIMMELSBACH

DOWNLOAD THIS: "Carry On Wayward Son"

KILLING JOKE

FOR BEGINNERS ✪✪

CAROLINE

They should have called it *For Obsessive Fans Who Want B-Sides and Live Tracks*

With pummeling tribal drums and guitars like icepicks scratching at granite, London proto-goths Killing Joke brought an impenetrable darkness to the early-'80s London punk scene. Singer Jaz Coleman dressed like an evil clown and sang of the destruction of humankind with a kind of glee, even taking a mid-career sabbatical in Iceland to wait out an apocalypse that never happened. They peaked in 1985 with stadium-sized rock anthems in "Love Like Blood" and "Eighties" (later pilfered by Nirvana for "Come As You Are"). Unfortunately, neither is included here. Rarities (live sludge-fest "The Fall of Because," a rejected, almost jaunty single mix of "Harlequin" from 1983) and album tracks prove inadequate, making *For Beginners* of no use to beginners.

TONY POWER

DOWNLOAD THIS: "The Wait"

LIVING COLOUR

LIVE AT CBGB's ✪✪✪

EPIC/LEGACY

NYC quartet drop a vintage live album heated enough to burn their funk-metal imitators

You can't fake the funk when your singer's squeezed into a lime spandex jumpsuit, looking like a rogue Skittle. With 1988's one-million-selling *Vivid*, Living Colour spiked Day-Glo guitar and jackhammer grooves with themes of African-American empowerment, creating social awareness with a smirk. *Live At CBGB's*, recorded in December 1989, is so intimate you nearly have to scrub off the stink of the pit. With Corey Glover's stirring, poly-octave wail and Vernon Reid's wrist-spraining guitar acrobatics, the band beats the stuffing out of tortured blues, sweaty metal and papier-maché ballads. "My ideas are mine alone," Glover wails, but with Sevendust and Rage Against the Machine quickly following in this band's footsteps, they wouldn't be for long. (*Available at LiveFromTheVaults.com*)

JASON BRACELIN

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Cult of Personality," "Solace of You"

Living Colour: "Argh! Our eyes!"

MARILYN MANSON

LEST WE FORGET ✪✪

INTERSCOPE

Nineties shock-rock icon doesn't scare anybody on limp retrospective

Ignore his controversial antics and ghoulish persona and Marilyn Manson has insight on censorship and teen alienation. But for such a bright guy, his ambitious concept albums often sink into dull goth clichés. Sadly, this 10-year, 17-track retrospective only confirms the shock-rocker's dependence on bombastic covers ("Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)") and Trent Reznor-derivative industrial metal. When he ignores hot-button issues, like on "This Is the New Shit," he's adept at brimstone catharsis. Too many songs, though, regurgitate hard-rock formulas, cynically heaping on the parental-advisory lyrics for prepubescent fans who confuse swearing with edginess. As a provocateur, Manson has yet to fully allow his music to catch up to his nimble mind.

TIM GRIERSON

DOWNLOAD THESE: "This Is the New Shit," "The Beautiful People"

JOHN MELLENCAMP

WORDS & MUSIC: GREATEST HITS ✪✪✪✪

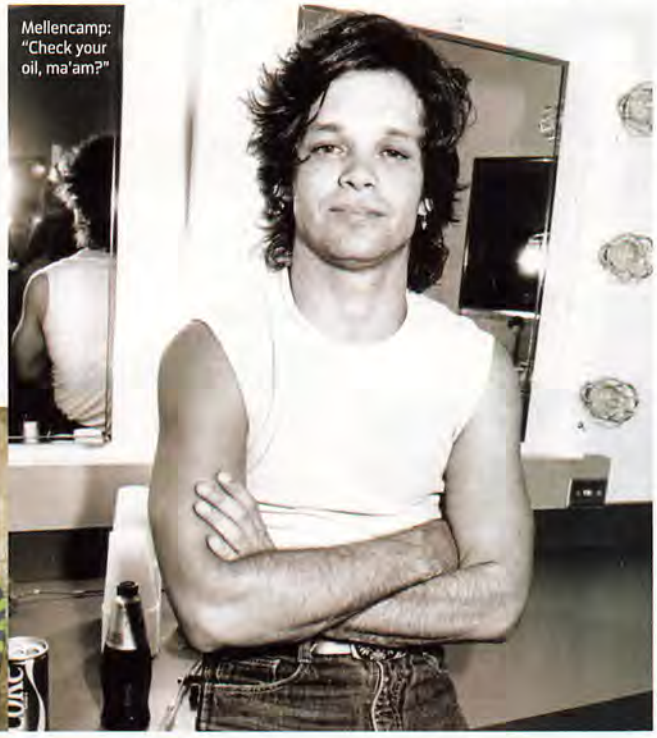
ISLAND

Salt-of-the-earth singer's sympathetic ballads and derivative rockers

John Mellencamp's first comprehensive career compilation shows how the Indiana singer built a career out of reflecting other populist rockers. He worked through a Springsteen-lite phase ("I Need a Lover") and rewrote a few melodies ("Paper In Fire" begat "Martha Say"), but found his niche as a small-town storyteller (the immortally cheesy "Jack & Diane") and as the unofficial voice of desperate farmers ("Rain On the Scarecrow"). Fusing rustic folk with bodacious drums in the '80s, he updated Rod Stewart's *Gasoline Alley* sound, then turned to uplifting yarns. The two new songs, "Walk Tall" and "Thank You," are simplistic rehashes, but they're exceptions. His songs can seem as plain as a flannel shirt, and often prove just as durable.

GREG KOT

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Crumblin' Down," "Human Wheels," "Rumble Seat"



Mellencamp: "Check your oil, ma'am?"

From left: Neal Preston/Corbis; Jorie Graen/LFI

Gwen Stefani: "Yeah, it's definitely termites."

JONI MITCHELL

DREAMLAND ✪✪✪

RHINO

Canadian songwriter, tortured by romance, ties together her career

"Best of" is not always the same as "greatest hits," as Joni Mitchell made clear in 1996, when she twinned an anthology of singles (*Hits*) with a collection of favorites that weren't smashes (*Misses*). *Dreamland* splits the difference, delivering '70s hits "Help Me" and "Free Man In Paris" while leaving room for uncommercial gems "Furry Sings the Blues" and the title tune. It's not without clunkers — "Dancin' Clown" hasn't got better with age — and fans may wonder about her exclusions ("Chelsea Morning," "A Case of You") and substitutions (swapping the string-soaked 2000 remake of "Both Sides Now" for the original). Still, a mix of hits and misses makes this the best available single-disc intro to Mitchell. *J.D. CONSIDINE*

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Free Man In Paris," "Furry Sings the Blues," "Big Yellow Taxi."

NO DOUBT

EVERYTHING IN TIME ✪✪✪

INTERSCOPE

Gwen and her merry men release rarities for fans who never doubted

These rarities aren't quite so rare, since they were part of last year's *Boom Box* set. But more casual fans of Gwen Stefani and her alt-ska hitmakers can, without shelling out for multimedia extras, check out endearing, younger examples of the marriage-minded tomboy agonizing over the task of taming restless playboys. Songs like the stop-start rocker "Big Distraction" and the dubby, aptly titled "Leftovers" pale beside the singles. But the remix-ready mambo "New Friend," self-help carnival ditty "Under Construction" and both the light-rock and heavy-cello versions of ballad "Everything In Time" are satisfying laments with truth-serum lyrics. And roughing it up a bit, Stefani attacks "Oi to the World" by jokey So-Cal punk godfathers the Vandals, with just-a-girl sass. *LAURA SINAGRA*

DOWNLOAD THESE: "New Friend," "Everything In Time," "Oi to the World"

SANTANA

SANTANA (LEGACY EDITION) ✪✪✪

COLUMBIA/LEGACY

More than you need to know about a Latin-rock landmark

SPICY '60s CLASSIC ROCK

In their never-ending quest to keep fans buying the same albums over and over, labels are assembling "deluxe" editions of familiar albums with more bonus material than there was music on the original. Unfortunately, more is sometimes less, as with this overstuffed repackaging of Santana's 1969 debut. Although the album holds up nicely, especially such conga-driven staples as "Evil Ways" and "Jingo," the outtake versions of "Savor" and "Soul Sacrifice" add little. And while hardcore fans may be curious to hear previously unreleased selections from Santana's abandoned first attempt at an album, the tracks mainly confirm Columbia Records' wisdom in having the band start over. Rounding things out are equally negligible selections from the band's performance at Woodstock. *J.D. CONSIDINE*

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Evil Ways," "Jingo."

VARIOUS ARTISTS

DOCTORS, PROFESSORS, KINGS & QUEENS: BIG OL' BOX OF NEW ORLEANS ✪✪✪

SHOUT! FACTORY

Four uneven discs show that New Orleans music, once weird and great, has turned safe and dull

This box wasn't assembled by the New Orleans Convention & Visitors Bureau, but it might as well have been. Like the modern-day Big Easy, it trades on the city's status as a musical wellspring to showcase professional revivalists running ➔

BURIED TREASURE

UNEARTHING LOST CLASSICS

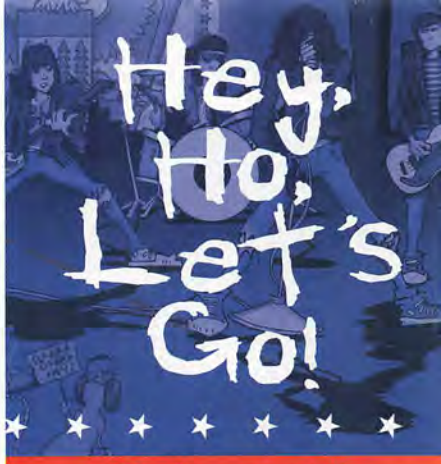
DE LA SOUL

DE LA SOUL IS DEAD ✪✪✪✪

TOMMY BOY, 1991

De la Soul: Hey, they're not dead at all!

After the sunny *3 Feet High and Rising*, these Long Island rappers could have milked their Day-Glo persona. But ambition wouldn't let them. On this fascinating, imperfect follow-up, the trio reject hippie positivity, and instead diversify and toughen their sound. Dissing house and hardcore with hilarious spot-on parodies, they also deepen as lyricists, examining incest and drug addiction. Ultimately, their distinctive, intelligent hip-hop kick-started the backpacker movement — and provided underground labels like Def Jux with worthy role models. *TIM GRIERSON*



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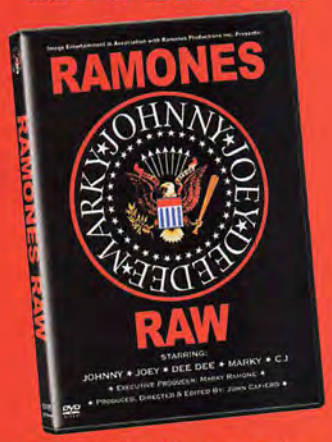

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GUEST LIST

COMPETITIONS, EVENTS AND OTHER FUN STUFF WE THOUGHT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

Penny Brungardt of Houston, guest and mother of Mandy Rose, took home the pot: $10,000!

VEGAS ROCK STAR POKER

★ THE HIGHLY ANTICIPATED Vegas Rock Star Poker tournament took place at the Palms Casino Resort in Las Vegas on August 27. Winners from across the country earned a seat at the table opposite **Dave Navarro**, **Tommy Lee** and **John Rzeznik** for a chance at $10,000. Penny Brungardt from Houston *(seen above with rockers)* took home the big pot.

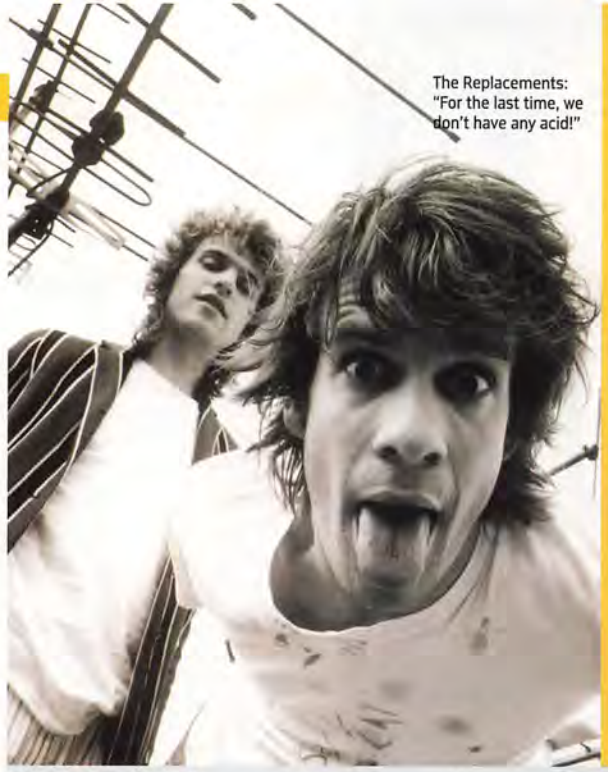
Courtesy of Clear Channel Entertainment © 2004 Denise Truscello/WIREIMAGES. All rights reserved.

NINTENDO FUSION TOUR

★ THE NINTENDO FUSION TOUR is unlike any other — it fuses emerging, cutting-edge music with the hottest gaming technology, and has been making its mark on cities since September. Now, it may still be heading your way! This year's 39-city tour brings together alternative and punk rock music and gaming with hotly tipped headliners **Story of the Year** and support acts **lostprophets**, **My Chemical Romance**, **Letter Kills**, **Anberlin** and **Autopilot Off**.

At each tour stop, music lovers will immerse themselves into an entertainment space with music and gaming kiosks featuring the hottest upcoming Nintendo GameCube™ games. Concert-goers will not just hear the hottest new bands, but they will also learn about the hottest new games and gaming systems from Nintendo — including a sneak preview of the new Nintendo DS, which uses the most cutting-edge technology with dual screens, wireless capabilities, a touch screen and voice recognition.

For complete details or more information check out Nintendofusiontour.com



The Replacements: "For the last time, we don't have any acid!"

Psycho Ward

Badly dressed brainiacs find new ways to be cool

VARIOUS ARTISTS

LEFT OF THE DIAL: DISPATCHES FROM THE 80'S UNDERGROUND

✪✪✪✪

RHINO

IS THERE ANYTHING more irritating than a die-hard underground fan? In the mid-1980s, bohemia turned — horror of horrors — modest. A scene ruled by crazy fashion fiends and sexpressionists became "anti-commercial" (meaning you couldn't dress up), and "grassroots" (meaning you could be a nerd and a snob simultaneously). Indie, as the underground was called, encouraged musicians to shoegaze instead of flounce, and fans to wear loyalties like secret-society rings instead of freak flags. Rhino producer Gary Stewart ends his note to this box set offering the indie mantra: "So did we change your life? That's OK, we changed ours." These days, with hip-hop going global and rockers campaigning, the statement seems a little narcissistic.

And yet, this labor of love is a vital, often profound, superfun ride. It honors the era's organic-farmer-style regionalism and entrepreneurial spirit. And by using broad definitions and spanning continents, it avoids the elitism underground champions often cultivated.

Straying overseas and beyond the radio dial's extreme left to include non-indie acts like the Psychedelic Furs makes the box less precise as a subcultural chronicle, but more entertaining. The big guns are here — R.E.M., the Replacements, Jane's Addiction, Sonic Youth — alongside little gem-makers like the Raincoats, slummers like the Pretenders and lost lodestars like the Minutemen and the Gun Club. Some key players — the Mekons, Big Black, the entire artistic population of New Zealand — are overlooked, but that's forgivable, because the set's parameters are so relaxed.

Unburdened by a rulebook, the artists are united mostly by blithe individualism. Because they weren't reaching for stardom (or, at least, feigned disinterest in it), they pursued odd, personal agendas. They could re-dye psychedelia, invent industrial music, warble love songs, or just bang on a can. As *Left of the Dial* represents it, this underground doesn't add up to anything clear, and yet it contains so much.

ANN POWERS

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Johnny Hit and Run Pauline" (X), "Freak Scene" (Dinosaur Jr.), "To Hell With Poverty" (Gang of Four)

rampant. Ignoring chronology, it mixes classic polyphonic jazz, irresistible piano R&B, and seminal proto-funk with Cajun and zydeco and overrated contemporary locals of every provenance and stylistic orientation. Sure there are great tracks few non-experts have heard — Dave Bartholomew's "Shrimp and Gumbo," Balfa Toujours's "Marshall's Club." But they're overwhelmed by pleasantly ordinary ones that make it a labor to find the gems. And the Crescent City's most original contemporary musician is totally absent: Mannie Fresh, back your azz in here.

ROBERT CHRISTGAU

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Potato Head Blues" (Louis Armstrong & His Hot Seven), "I'm Walkin' " (Fats Domino)

VIRGIN PRUNES

A NEW FORM OF BEAUTY ✪✪✪

. . . IF I DIE, I DIE ✪✪✪✪

HERESIE ✪✪

OVER THE RAINBOW ✪✪✪

THE MOON LOOKED DOWN AND LAUGHED ✪✪✪

MUTE

Irish wackjobs, related to U2, go from art-school noise to cabaret-goth

In circa-1980 Dublin, the Virgin Prunes were regarded as U2's much weirder older brothers. (Guitarist Dik Evans actually *is* the Edge's older brother.) As theatrical as a velvet cape, they featured three lead singers who contorted their wailing voices into caricatures of menace. *A New Form of Beauty*, a collection of four EPs that seem more concerned with ugliness, runs about 60 percent sophomoric art-squeal, 40 percent genuinely creepy dramatic atmospheres. The album *. . . If I Die, I Die* (1982) tightens up the Prunes' meandering whirrs and moans into acidic miniatures, most of which hit a whiplash dance groove. The same year's half-live *Heresie* is a shuddery, pained document of the dementia that comes from sleep deprivation: ambitious but hard to take. Their 1986 farewell, *The* ➔

I LOVE THIS CD!

JUDE LAW
ACTOR IN *ALFIE*, I ❤ *HUCKABEES*

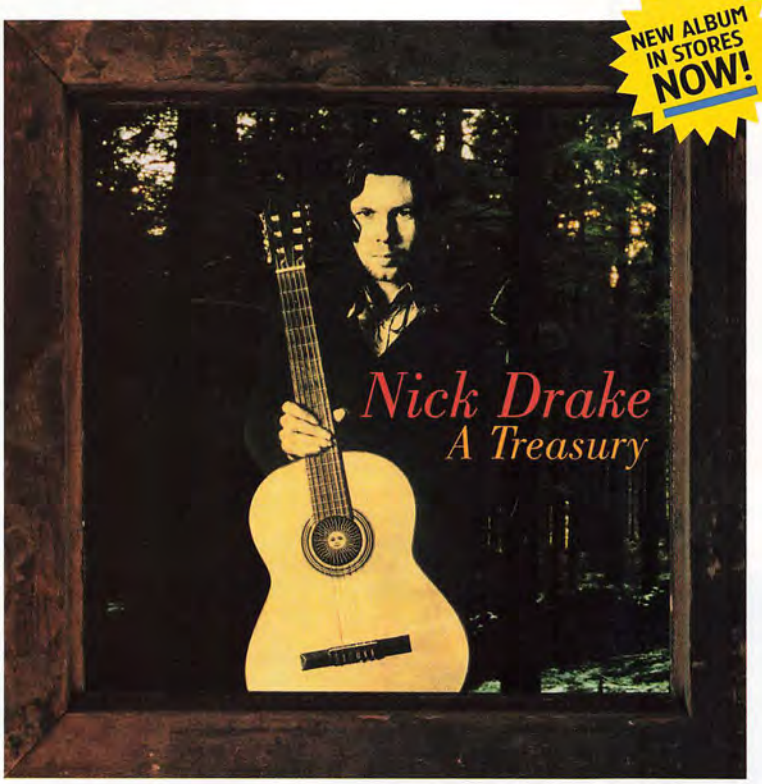
PIXIES
WAVE OF MUTILATION: THE BEST OF THE PIXIES *4AD*

"What I like about the Pixies is that they're all about the music and nothing about the image."

From top: Patrick Quigley/Retna Ltd.; Sara De Boer/Retna Ltd.

GUEST LIST

COMPETITIONS, EVENTS AND OTHER FUN STUFF WE THOUGHT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT



LOVE THE DRAKE!

>> A SINGULAR TALENT who passed almost unnoticed during his brief lifetime, Nick Drake produced three studio albums of somber beauty: *Five Leaves Left* (1969), *Bryter Layter* (1970), and *Pink Moon* (1972).

A Treasury is the definitive collection of 16 classic songs by Nick Drake, this is the perfect album for curious music lovers to pick up.

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Gaesteliste Magazine | Germany

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© Martin Mull

Moon Looked Down and Laughed, is their most straightforwardly goth-rock album — Bono's pal Gavin Friday was gradually bending the band toward his demi-Satanic cabaret-singer persona. *Over the Rainbow* wraps up the rest of their discography, including hammering, punk-inflected early singles and some eerie oddities.

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD THESE: "Pagan Lovesong," "Red Nettle"

THE WAILERS

BURNIN' ✪✪✪✪

ISLAND/TUFF GONG

Even exhausted and fracturing, these three kings wrote reggae classics

REGGAE'S GREATEST BAND

When they banged out *Burnin'* in 1973, the Wailers were already falling apart. They'd been stars in Jamaica for years, but as they attempted to go international, Bob Marley assumed control and Bunny Wailer prepared to exit the group he'd named himself after. With a newly tough, guitar-driven sound, they were nonetheless short of new material: The album includes no fewer than three slick, less mysterious remakes of "Small Axe." Still, they came up with indelible, militant anthems — "I Shot the Sheriff" (an Eric Clapton cover gave them an American boost), "Get Up, Stand Up," "Burnin' and Lootin'" — and the Wailers' three-part harmonies never cut deeper. *Burnin'* includes an initially spirited, eventually draggy live gig recorded in England, immediately before Peter Tosh left the band, too.

DOUGLAS WOLK

DOWNLOAD THESE: "I Shot the Sheriff," "You Can't Blame the Youth" (live)

The Wailers save on passport photos.

BLENDER APPROVED

The best REISSUES of the last three months

THE CLASH

LONDON CALLING (LEGACY EDITION)

EPIC/LEGACY

With bonus songs and documentary, this two-fer turned London's most ambitious punks into full rock stars.

THE KINKS

MUSWELL HILLBILLIES

KOCH

In a country-flavored 1971 romp, British sophisticates mock American consumerism with fun sing-a-longs and emotional complexity.

SUPERGRASS

SUPERGRASS IS 10

ISLAND

Full of cheeky charm, this Brit-pop trio celebrates rock at its most fun. ("Caught By the Fuzz" makes getting arrested sound great!)

MACY GRAY

THE VERY BEST OF MACY GRAY

EPIC

With a voice like Louis Armstrong on helium, the Ohio-born R&B star ambles through this slightly premature hits set with smoky grace.

Top: Adrian Boot/Retna Ltd.

REISSUES IN BRIEF BY JON YOUNG

James Brown declines to "get up off o' that thing."

ALLMAN BROTHERS BAND

THE ESSENTIAL ALLMAN BROTHERS BAND: THE EPIC YEARS ✪✪✪

EPIC/LEGACY

The reunited Allmans returned to fighting shape in the '90s, energized by the lead guitar tandem of newcomer Warren Haynes and mainstay Dicky Betts. While live takes on "Blue Sky" and "Midnight Rider" compare favorably with the originals, the standout is the after-hours ballad "Get On with Your Life," where Gregg Allman groans like Satan has his soul in a hammerlock.

JAMES BROWN

SEX MACHINE TODAY ✪✪✪

HIP-O SELECT

By 1975, Brown no longer led the funk revolution, and he resented it. Despite an undercurrent of gnawing desperation — the album is subtitled "Disco Soul" — the grooves remain tight and satisfying, even on a redundant remake of "I Feel Good." Catch the defensive monologue in "Dead On It," where Brown mutters, "I admit we wasn't as funky as we used to be."

THE LONG RYDERS

THE BEST OF THE LONG RYDERS ✪✪✪

PRIMA

The Long Ryders' folk-rock jangle and moody twang were an '80s harbinger of alt-country. For all the mellow charms of tunes like "Lights of Downtown," though, the L.A. quartet never outgrew its Byrds-Burrito Bros. obsession to find a distinctive voice. Original Byrd Gene Clark guests on "Ivory Tower," providing a big endorsement.

MISSISSIPPI SHEIKS

HONEY BABE LET THE DEAL GO DOWN ✪✪✪✪

COLUMBIA/LEGACY

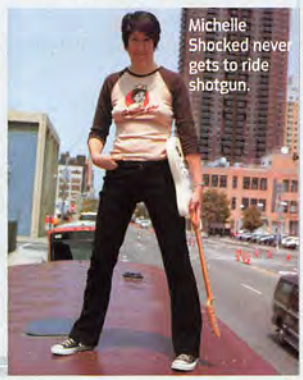
Originators of the blues standard "Sitting on Top of the World" (covered by Cream and the Grateful Dead), Mississippi Sheiks were anything but primitive country musicians. With Lonnie Chatman's flying fiddle driving these exciting '30s recordings, the string band is slick and sophisticated, a match for the fanciest bluegrass and a precursor of self-contained rock & roll groups.

MICHELLE SHOCKED

ARKANSAS TRAVELER ✪✪✪

MIGHTY SOUND

Following a botched foray into swing music, folk provocateur Shocked rediscovered her strengths in 1991, conducting a rousing tour of traditional American styles. Fellow travelers include gospel master Pops Staples, Uncle Tupelo, the String Cheese Incident and Taj Mahal, who helps her expose racist minstrel jive on the deadpan "Jump Jim Crow."



Michelle Shocked never gets to ride shotgun.

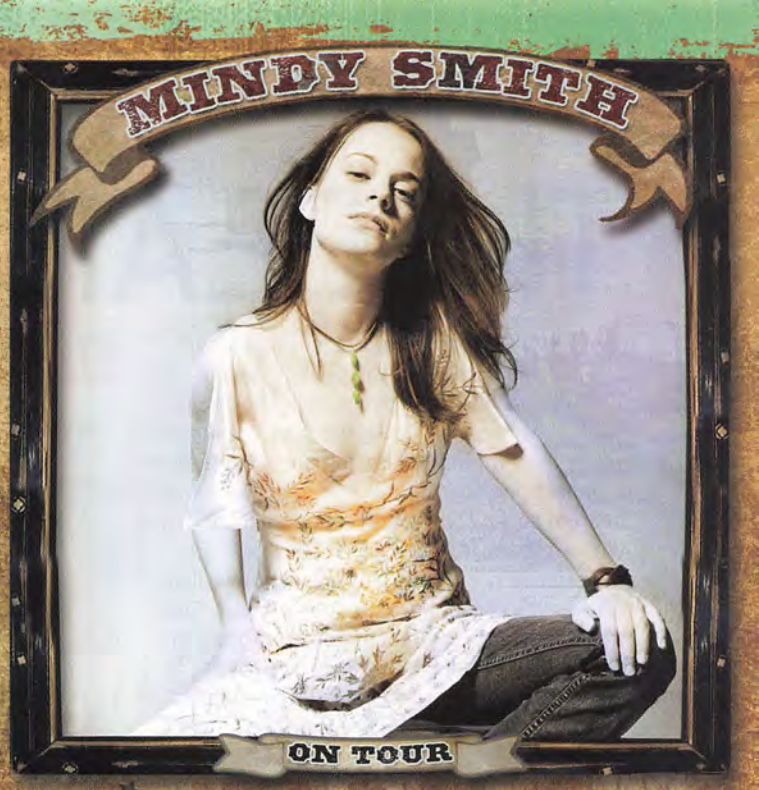
JOHNNY WINTER

SECOND WINTER (LEGACY EDITION) ✪✪✪✪

COLUMBIA/LEGACY

Inspired by Jimi Hendrix, the albino Texas bluesman explored his freaky side in 1969. Alongside ferocious covers of Bob Dylan and Chuck Berry, he unleashes the psychedelic gem "The Good Love" and "Fast Life Rider," a fractured, wild-eyed rant. A second disc offering a '70 concert returns Winter to traditional turf, grinding out "It's My Own Fault Baby" for 12 minutes.

From top: David Reed/Corbis; James Patrick Cooper/Retna Ltd.



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SAT OCT 23	Minneapolis, MN	SUN NOV 07	West Hollywood, CA
SUN OCT 24	Chicago, IL	FRI NOV 12	Nashville, TN
WED OCT 27	Lawrence, KS	SAT NOV 13	Nashville, TN
THU OCT 28	Boulder, CO	THU NOV 18	Birmingham, AL
FRI OCT 29	Park City, UT	FRI NOV 19	Atlanta, GA
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THE BEATLES

EVERY ORIGINAL CD REVIEWED

The bookshelves bulge with learned theories about the Beatles, which makes it easy to overlook one point. Simply: They were the greatest weapon yet devised for promoting human enjoyment on a global scale. Back in the '60s, they were at the heart of social change and a musical revolution. Without them, it's likely this magazine would not exist. And if anything of pop culture will live forever, it's probably the Beatles' albums. Since their transfer to CD (reconfigured to follow the sequencing of the original British releases), new generations have discovered the Beatles' magic for themselves. There is no law ordering you to enjoy the music of John, Paul, George and Ringo, but it's fiendishly difficult not to.
By PAUL DU NOYER

The Beatles, from left: John Lennon, Ringo Starr, George Harrison and Paul McCartney

Michael Ochs Archive

ESSENTIAL

RUBBER SOUL *CAPITOL, 1965*

★★★★★

Their talent was already a source of wonder, but now the songs themselves were turning mysterious. Under the influence of Bob Dylan — and, it might be said, marijuana — the Fab Four laced their tunefulness with new introspection, wordplay and social comment. University professors and newspaper columnists started taking note.
Download these: "Drive My Car," "Norwegian Wood (This Bird Has Flown)," "In My Life," "Nowhere Man"

REVOLVER *CAPITOL, 1966*

★★★★★

Even in lives that moved at lightning speed, the Beatles' upheavals of 1966 were startling. Maturing overnight from happy mop-tops to psychedelic gurus, they revolutionized their own style and rock music itself. Thanks to innate genius, some studio wizardry and perhaps a touch of chemical inspiration, *Revolver* overturned the conventions of pop with the boldest innovations of the band's career.
Download these: "Here, There and Everywhere," "She Said, She Said," "Tomorrow Never Knows"

SGT. PEPPER'S LONELY HEARTS CLUB BAND *CAPITOL, 1967*

★★★★★

Renouncing live appearances, the group holed up in Abbey Road Studios in London and emerged with the masterpiece that defined 1967's summer of love. Gaudy and daring, *Pepper* may not be a coherent "concept album," but its complexity spelled the end of teen-pop innocence, and not even the Beatles knew where music could go next.
Download these: "She's Leaving Home," "A Day In the Life"

THE BEATLES *APPLE/CAPITOL, 1968*

★★★★★

Cracks in their façade had begun to show by 1968: The double album, nicknamed "The White Album," is more like a compilation of solo tracks. But its reckless diversity is thrilling. Even the unlistenable "Revolution 9" bespeaks a bravery we'll seldom see again.
Download these: "Back In the USSR," "Happiness Is a Warm Gun," "Helter Skelter"

1 *APPLE/CAPITOL, 2000*

★★★★★

Except for the omission of the breakthrough hit "Please Please Me" and "Strawberry Fields Forever," it's impossible to fault the 27-song track list.
Download these: "I Want to Hold Your Hand," "Hey Jude," "Help!"

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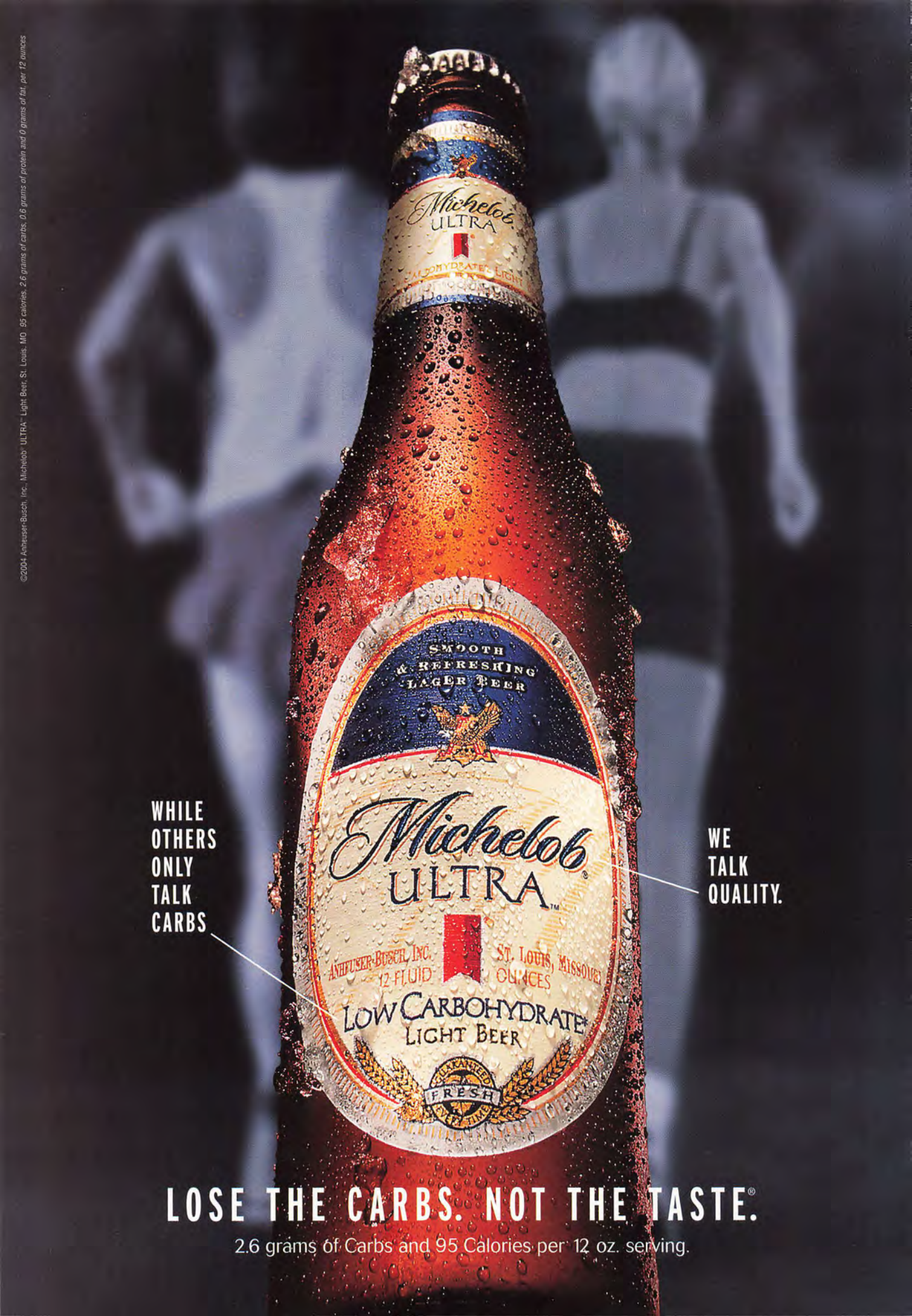

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PLEASE PLEASE ME *CAPITOL, 1963*

✪✪

After its blistering opening bar (the "1, 2, 3, 4" that kick-starts "I Saw Her Standing There"), this studio debut is a cautious retread of the young band's largely secondhand stage set, all recorded in a single day. But Lennon's leather-lunged closer, "Twist and Shout," is an astonishing climax.

Download these: "I Saw Her Standing There," "Please Please Me," "Twist and Shout"

BEATLES FOR SALE *CAPITOL, 1964*

✪✪✪

It's almost a relief to see they were human after all. The manic pace of world conquest took its toll on this stopgap album, which was too hurried to include more than a few originals.

Download these: "I'll Follow the Sun," "Eight Days a Week," "No Reply"

YELLOW SUBMARINE

APPLE/CAPITOL, 1969

✪✪

The group's lack of interest in their cartoon movie is betrayed by lackluster songs, while the entire second half is given to producer George Martin's orchestral score.

Download these: "It's All Too Much," "Hey Bulldog"

LET IT BE *APPLE/CAPITOL, 1970*

✪✪

Optimistically billed on its sleeve as "a new-phase Beatles album," it actually portrays a band falling apart. Not even Phil Spector's post-production could redeem these underworked, abandoned session tapes. Despite a few immortal songs, it was a messy finale to the Beatles' story: They split up the week it went on sale.

Download these: "Across the Universe," "Let It Be"

FOR FANS ONLY

LIVE AT THE BBC *CAPITOL, 1994*

✪✪

LOW-FI COVER VERSIONS!

A double CD of early slots on British radio. Plenty of period flavor (the band banters with balding, elderly DJs) and lots of rock & roll covers that were never on regular Beatles albums. But it's neither as wild as their live sets nor as sparkling as the studio records.

Download this: "Some Other Guy"

1962 LIVE AT STAR CLUB IN HAMBURG

WALTERS, 2000

✪

Periodically repackaged, this is an amateur recording of the group's last nightclub show in Germany in 1962 before their return to England and imminent stardom. Historically interesting, with distinct hints of a passionate live act, but the audio is too poor to pass muster.

Download this: "Everybody's Tryin' to Be My Baby"

IN THE BEGINNING *POLYGRAM, 2000*

✪

Much-recycled 1961 tracks, cut in Germany when, pre-fame, they were the backing band for singer Tony Sheridan. It has decent covers of assorted standards and one Beatles instrumental, but frankly, it could be any average band of the time.

Download this: "Ain't She Sweet"

"All together now: You put your right foot in. . . ."

Michael Ochs Archive

FURTHER LISTENING

ANTHOLOGY VOLS. 1, 2, 3

APPLE/CAPITOL, 1995 – 1996

✪✪✪

Three double CDs bring alternate takes, live recordings and unreleased tracks out of the bootleggers' realm. But the "reunion" tracks that built upon the late Lennon's tapes of "Free As a Bird" and "Real Love" were anticlimactic.

FURTHER READING

REVOLUTION IN THE HEAD

HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY, 1998

✪✪✪✪✪

This scholarly volume offers track-by-track critiques and historical context to the Beatles' entire output. Brainy and unrivaled.

FURTHER VIEWING

THE BEATLES ANTHOLOGY DVD

APPLE/CAPITOL, 2003

✪✪✪✪✪

This five-disc set expands on the TV series with video clips, interviews and live footage. It's a massive documentary that still catches the sheer fun of it all and reveals Ringo Starr's hidden talent as a warm-hearted *raconteur*.

GREAT

MAGICAL MYSTERY TOUR
CAPITOL, 1967
✪✪✪✪✪

BETTER THAN THE FILM!

They lost the plot with their dopey TV film, but 1967 was still their zenith as songwriters. For once, the U.S. release went better than the British original. In place of two vinyl EPs came a whole album filled with classic singles – including "All You Need Is Love" and "Penny Lane" – from the period. The result was simply the best set of Beatles tunes so far on a single disc.
Download these: "Strawberry Fields Forever," "Magical Mystery Tour," "I Am the Walrus"

WITH THE BEATLES *CAPITOL, 1963*
✪✪✪✪

The hits were beginning, the girls had started screaming, and the Beatles had blossomed as songwriters. Thanks to the freshness and ingenuity of John Lennon and Paul McCartney originals, such as "All My Loving," the group grew bigger than Elvis Presley and became the focus of a whole generation's dreams. Even in more jaded times, *With the Beatles* is still joyful noise.
Download these: "It Won't Be Long," "All My Loving," "Money (That's What I Want)"

ABBEY ROAD *APPLE/CAPITOL, 1969*
✪✪✪✪

Actually the last record the Beatles made (though *Let It Be* was released later), *Abbey Road* was a wonderfully constructed swan song, especially in the breathless final medley of "Golden Slumbers/Carry That Weight/The End." In the band's dying days, George Harrison also emerged as a great songwriter, contributing some of *Abbey Road*'s most beguiling tracks.
Download these: "Come Together," "Here Comes the Sun," "Something"

1962–1966 *APPLE/CAPITOL, 1973*
✪✪✪✪

Often called "The Red Album" because of its sleeve design, this is the posthumous compilation of hit singles and well-known album tracks that for many years formed the closest thing there was to a Beatles' "Greatest Hits" package. Focusing on the early years, it's mostly poppy and jubilant, though still inventive at every turn. It's an efficient summary of the first half of the Beatles' career.
Download these: "She Loves You," "I Want to Hold Your Hand," "I Feel Fine"

1967–1970 *APPLE/CAPITOL, 1973*
✪✪✪✪

For fans of a later generation, this and the so-called "Red Album" provided an introduction to the Fab Four. This collection, nicknamed – you guessed it – "The Blue Album," is made up of later Beatles standouts that demonstrate their growing depth and sonic complexity without foregoing that unsurpassed mass appeal. As such, it forms a great primer, but won't satisfy anyone seeking the more esoteric material found on their "proper" albums from this period.
Download these: "Strawberry Fields Forever," "Penny Lane," "Hey Jude"

PAST MASTERS VOLS. 1 & 2
APPLE/CAPITOL, 1988
✪✪✪✪

Assembling a selection of hit singles, overlooked but excellent B-sides, and some non-album rarities, this compilation offers up a useful way to plug those pesky gaps in a Beatles collection – including, should you want them, German versions of both "I Want to Hold Your Hand" and "She Loves You." And if you go for vinyl, you can even buy the pair together.
Download these: "She's a Woman," "Rain," "I'm Down"

CHECK IT OUT

A HARD DAY'S NIGHT *CAPITOL, 1964*
✪✪✪✪

Written at breakneck speed for the movie that captured Beatlemania at its purest, the songs' sheer vitality flatters a beat group style grown formulaic. But they were wildly successful back then and immensely enjoyable now.
Standout tracks: "A Hard Day's Night," "Can't Buy Me Love," "Things We Said Today"

HELP! *CAPITOL, 1965*
✪✪✪

The movie's stilted pace reflects the band's embarrassment at playing the wacky roles they had now outgrown. For the real deal, look to the spin-off album, which shows a novel candor, especially in Lennon's autobiographical "Help!" and McCartney's "Yesterday."
Download these: "Ticket to Ride," "Help!"

YELLOW SUBMARINE SONGTRACK *APPLE/CAPITOL, 1999*
✪✪✪

Remastered versions of all the numbers featured in the cartoon movie – minus the orchestral score – make this "songtrack" a more consistent listen than the original soundtrack. Still, it's a rather disjointed compilation.
Download these: "Eleanor Rigby," "Lucy In the Sky With Diamonds," "It's All Too Much"

LET IT BE . . . NAKED *APPLE/CAPITOL, 2003*
✪✪✪

THE "REMIX" ALBUM

A rescue mission on the botched last album. Abbey Road engineers have restored the original 1969 session tapes to reveal the gutsy garage band at the Beatles' core. And a revised track list replaces throwaway items with the lost Lennon gem "Don't Let Me Down."
Download these: "Get Back," "Don't Let Me Down," "Across the Universe"

The Ladies' Man

Songs about cheating and Jesus, as the new kings of pop thrill the Big Easy

Usher: "I know that's not my own hand."

USHER AND KANYE WEST

NEW ORLEANS ARENA, NEW ORLEANS, LOUISIANA

AUGUST 14, 2004 ★★★★★

HE'S BARELY HALFWAY through his set, but Usher wants a groupie — now. "You in the blue dress," he commands. "Come up here." Twenty rows away, a girl named Lisa bugs her eyes incredulously, leaps up and down, and clambers toward the stage.

Clutching flowers, he launches into the silky booty-call jam "Do It to Me," lays a beaming Lisa gently across a *chaise longue*, and leans in slowly for a kiss. At the crucial moment, Usher hides his lips behind a tilted hat: The kiss is a phantom. It's a perfectly crafted bit of theater — this seasoned Romeo knows the mere hint of physical contact can be as titillating as the real thing. Sure enough, ecstatic shrieks quickly drown out the song.

This has been Usher's year. He's turned a tabloid split from longtime girlfriend Rozonda "Chilli" Thomas of TLC into inspiration for the year's best-selling album, the four-million-selling *Confessions*. Now that R. Kelly has scrubbed down his lothario act in the face of legal troubles, Usher is R&B's undisputed King of Sex. The Truth tour, the most successful road stint of his career, is his intercontinental coronation.

Usher's tourmate, Kanye West, the rapper-producer who debuted with the excellent *College Dropout* this February, is 2004's other success story, but he offers a stark contrast to the headliner. By turns earnest, satirical and self-deprecating, he's a comically unsuave everyman.

Backed in his opening set by piano-playing homey John Legend and champion DJ A-Trak, Kanye West is swallowed by the vast surroundings. But what West lacks in presence, he makes up for with eccentricity: Spurring himself into a frenzy on the set's pounding highlight, "Jesus Walks," he convulses across the stage like a Southern Baptist. It's as winningly awkward and unself-consciously excited a moment as you'll find in hip-hop — and with Don Juan himself set to take the stage, it's the only truly unguarded moment of the night.

Kanye West: "Next tour, I need dancers!"

IT'S A CRUNK & B EXPLOSION!

Great soul men thrive on conflict, and Usher is no different. Accompanied by six dancers and a full band, he pivots around a dilemma: sex or more sex? He's R&B's poet laureate of infidelity. "Cheating is the world's greatest pastime!" he tells *Blender*. "You have to write songs people can relate to."

He devotes his set to serenading his female admirers, teasing them and — during his 1996 foreplay ode "Nice and Slow" — humping the air in their general direction.

ECSTATIC SHRIEKS DROWN OUT USHER.

There's little doubt that tonight's sold-out, 17,000-strong audience — mostly young black females tottering on high heels a few inches longer than their skirts — is among the wildest the Atlanta dandy will face. Hormonal, hyperventilating, and Dirty South-proud, this crowd is his base.

"There was love in the air," Usher tells *Blender* after the show. "They get crunk in the South. *Extremely* crunk."

On "My Way," he warns that no one's girlfriend is safe from

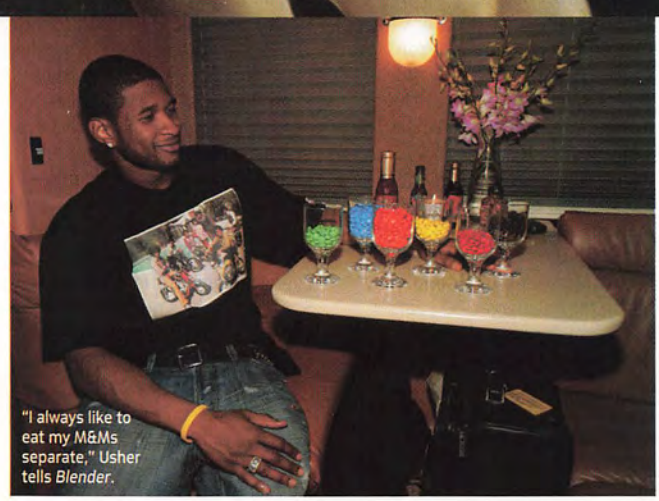
Frank Micallotta

his orgasm-provoking touch. "Confessions Pt. II," about impregnating a "chick on the side" and watching his relationship crumble because of it, is the night's best ballad. He performs it seated and alone, and the austerity throws his histrionic anguish into striking relief.

He saves "Yeah!" — which recounts an illicit tryst at a club — for last, skipping his voice like a stone across shrieking synths, as confetti and columns of sparks explode around him.

During "U Don't Have to Call," Usher's sparkly sneakers make for the most inspired — and ludicrous — of the night's many costume changes. They have wheels in their heels, allowing Usher to incorporate superhuman glides into his dance steps. But his moves are already impossibly graceful.

Throughout the 90-minute set, he swivels and tangles his legs, yanks his chest around like it's attached to an invisible rope, lands backflips and negotiates a dazzling compromise between lapdancing and breakdancing, never missing a step or a note. He's like the black Michael Jackson. *JONAH WEINER*



"I always like to eat my M&Ms separate," Usher tells *Blender*.

Brandon Flowers of the Killers: "Playing with one hand is *veddy* British."

Keys To the City

Brit-loving new wavers from Las Vegas seduce London on a breakout tour

THE KILLERS

KENTISH TOWN FORUM, LONDON

AUGUST 23, 2004 ✪✪✪✪

BRANDON FLOWERS ISN'T a talkative front man, but halfway through the latest show in the Killers' lightning-quick conquest of the U.K., he can't stay quiet. "I feel overwhelmed," he says to cheers. "Every time we come back to England, you guys are so amazing, and your reactions have filtered back to America. You figured it out before they did."

It's no surprise England loves the Las Vegas quartet. Fans are just enacting the other half of a transatlantic affair dating back to Flowers's Anglophile adolescence in Utah, when the Smiths and the Pet Shop Boys gave him a taste for bittersweet melodrama. Now, his band repackages 20 years' worth of Britpop and wraps it in neon and glitter. And it's working: Morrissey, New Order and Duran Duran have all lent their seal of approval. "As long as we get U2 and Noel [Gallagher] behind us, I'll be happy," Flowers tells *Blender*.

Many of his British heroes failed in America, but Flowers, along with his brothers-in-couture Franz Ferdinand and Scissor Sisters, has successfully sold archness and flamboyance at home — the Killers' album zipped onto the U.S. Top 40. Still, they confined "Glamorous Indie Rock & Roll," a tongue-in-cheek, Oasis-style power ballad, to the U.K. version of their album. It's revealing that the crowd at the Forum sings along without reservation as Flowers cries, "It's indie rock & roll for me." But are they in on the song's dig at underachieving American indie rockers, misinterpreting it as a straight-faced celebration, or just enjoying the hook?

Onstage, the Killers aren't in the eyebrow-raising business. Even though their intro music is Shirley Bassey's none-more-camp *Love Story* theme "Where Do I Begin?" they neither smirk nor snicker. Bassist Mark Stoermer is all facial hair and deadpan poise; David Keuning plays guitar beneath the biggest cloud of frizz this side of the Strokes' Albert Hammond Jr.; and, behind the drums, Ronnie Vannucci thumps with such zeal you suspect he might be having a seizure. The clean-cut Flowers, dressed with first-date smartness, is visibly growing out of his awkwardness and learning to love his pin-up status. When a pair of pink panties appears from the front row during "Andy, You're a Star," he catches them in midair and twirls them on his finger before tossing them aside.

BRITPOP, VEGAS-STYLE

With the right song, the Killers' overdriven, restraint-be-damned ambition is irresistible. Commencing with the outrageously jealous "Mr. Brightside," their verses are hookier than some bands' choruses and they fuse bands that were once mortal enemies, sounding like Duran Duran *and* the Smiths, Blur *and* Oasis. Only Flowers's occasional Morrissey-Xeroxing yodel steers uncomfortably close to *Indie Idol* parody. And when he sings a line as European as "We had a fight on the promenade out in the rain" ("Jenny Was a Friend of Mine"), it seems as though he's trying to apply for U.K. citizenship.

A head cooler than those of sweaty fans bobbing in the front rows might argue that weaker songs, such as "Believe Me, Natalie," don't become great simply by piling on the bombast. But there's no denying the time-is-now excitement that crackles through the Forum. The pulse of "Somebody Told Me" ("Somebody told me that you had a boyfriend/ Who looked like a girlfriend that I had in February last year") shakes the floor, and a forest of raised arms greets grand finale "All These Things That I've Done," which is like four songs in one and should have Freddie Mercury applauding from the afterlife.

On CD, the song has a gospel choir, but not tonight. "Maybe when we're playing Wembley we'll bring them along," Flowers tells *Blender* later, casually mentioning London's biggest indoor rock venue. Even his ambitions are British. *DORIAN LYNSKEY*

HOW'D YOU LIKE THE SHOW?

"They're the new Strokes. I haven't seen them before but I'd come again. They're even better than on the record."
MONIQUE MORANHA, 23, STUDENT, FARNBOROUGH

"They were better at Glastonbury, but it was still fucking amazing. Brandon had good shoes, and shoes are important."
ALEX BARRETT, 25, RETAIL BUYER, LONDON

"I rarely catch a band on the way up. They are the band I've waited for because they put rock and indie with synths."
DAVID CATTERMOLE, 20, STUDENT, CROYDON

Elliott Franks/Live (4)

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"If only I had a microphone!"

THE GOOD!

CHARLES IN CHARGE

Jamie Foxx dazzles as the heroin-loving, skirt-chasing R&B genius. By Clark Collis

RAY

DIRECTED BY Taylor Hackford

STARRING Jamie Foxx, Regina King, Kerry Washington

THEY DON'T REALLY make biopics like *Ray* anymore — and that's probably a good thing. A leisurely trawl through the late, great Ray Charles's early highs and lows, the movie is both stiffly chronological and often absurdly expositional: Its characters emit lines like, "Mr Charles? My name is Ahmet Ertegun," or "Ray, 'I Got a Woman' is a smash, and you've got to start thinking about the next single!" Or "Poor, black *and* blind? Dude, rather you than me." OK, so that last quote actually isn't in the movie but it wouldn't seem so far out of place in a film that is often as leaden as director Taylor Hackford's two most recent turkeys, *The Devil's Advocate* and *Proof of Life*.

But *Ray* has three aces up its sleeve. First of all, it is very much a warts-and-all biopic. And, by "warts" we mean mostly "heroin," although also given ample screen time are Charles's Olympic-level philandering and occasional disloyalty to long-standing musical comrades. The remarkable thing is that, despite his numerous faults, you still can't help liking the guy.

DESPITE FAULTS, YOU CAN'T HELP LIKING HIM.

Which brings us to *Ray*'s second ace: Jamie Foxx's performance. Where previous turns in *Any Given Sunday*, *Ali* and the recent *Collateral* showed that the erstwhile comedian had dramatic promise, *Ray* reveals Foxx as the real deal in his brilliant, Oscar-worthy portrayal of Charles as a son of a bitch people couldn't help falling in love with.

He is also, frankly, very good at playing a blind man who more than followed his mother's advice to "never let nobody turn you into a cripple."

Moreover, it is to the credit of all concerned that Charles's affliction and his ways of overcoming it are not merely dispensed with in a couple of scenes but presented as a central part of his story, albeit often humorously. Ray, we learn early on, believed it was possible to tell how beautiful a woman was by feeling her wrist. In a great running joke, he is shown again and again pawing the extremities of fans who have no idea they are being sized up as potential bedroom partners.

But the third and probably best reason to see *Ray* is its soundtrack of classic Charles tunes. While the media coverage following his death earlier this year could hardly have been more fulsome, it is this film that really acts as a suitable obituary, a reminder that not only could Charles sing, play piano and write better than virtually anyone else, but he could do all three in pretty much every damn musical genre you can imagine. As a result, the product is a film you'd have to be deaf *and* blind not to enjoy.

Nicola Goode

SURVIVING CHRISTMAS

DIRECTED BY Mike Mitchell

STARRING Ben Affleck, Christina Applegate, James Gandolfini

CONCERNING ITSELF WITH a lonely guy who rents himself a family for Christmas, this alleged comedy stars Affleck, currently on a run of cinematic clunkers not matched since John Travolta's wilderness years. The trailer, meanwhile, yields not one laugh even when scrutinized by an electron microscope. Frankly, *Blender* hopes we're wrong on this one. You can't have enough funny comedies at the festive season to take your mind off grandma's flatulence, and *Surviving Christmas* could be this year's *Bad Santa*. But the smart money is betting on it being just plain *bad*.

SIDEWAYS

DIRECTED BY Alexander Payne

STARRING Paul Giamatti, Thomas Haden Church, Virginia Madsen

Sideways finds director Alexander Payne relocating from the Nebraskan locales of *About Schmidt* and *Election* to California wine country. That's where Miles (Giamatti) and Jack (Church) vacation before the latter gets married. Self-confessed "fucking loser" Giamatti, even more hangdog than he was in *American Splendor*, wants to wallow in wine and self-pity, but ad-voiceover-man Church just wants to get his "joint" worked on. Pathos, humor and alarming nudity ensue in a movie that's every bit as tasty as Giamatti's beloved Pinot Grigiot.

BLENDER APPROVED

The best MOVIES of the last three months

DIG!

The Brian Jonestown Massacre's Anton Newcombe redefines "ego" in the rock movie of the year.

SHAUN OF THE DEAD

At last! A movie for cinemagoers who like romantic comedies *and* flesh-eating zombies!

LAST GOOD MOVIE YOU SAW?

UNCLE KRACKER, KID ROCK'S DJ

"*Narc*. It's an old '70s-style cop movie with ass-kicking and money-skimming."

AND THE REST...

DON'T MISS

THE INCREDIBLES

DIRECTED BY Brad Bird

STARRING Craig T. Nelson, Samuel L. Jackson

THE PITCH A dysfunctional family of retired superheroes live quiet lives courtesy of the witness-protection program. But adventure calls, and Mr. Incredible decides to squeeze back into his tights!

THE VERDICT Probably destined to be every bit as poor and unsuccessful as Pixar's *Toy Story*, *Monsters Inc.* and *Finding Nemo*.

THE RINGER

DIRECTED BY Barry W. Blaustein

STARRING Johnny Knoxville, Brian Cox

THE PITCH To solve his money problems, Johnny Knoxville does the obvious thing and . . . enters the Special Olympics!

THE VERDICT We *love* Knoxville, and it seems a perfect fit for project godfathers the Farrelly brothers. But will it be as funny as the recent episode of *South Park* in which Cartman . . . enters the Special Olympics!?

TEAM AMERICA: WORLD POLICE

DIRECTED BY Trey Parker, Matt Stone

STARRING Trey Parker, Matt Stone, Alec Baldwin, Dian Bachar

THE PITCH *South Park* creators and madmen Parker and Stone pull the strings on a marionette-starring comedy about the always-hilarious subject of global terrorism.

THE VERDICT Ideal for people who liked *Fahrenheit 9/11* but thought it should have been a bit more controversial.

DON'T RUSH

ALEXANDER

DIRECTED BY Oliver Stone

STARRING Colin Farrell, Angelina Jolie, Val Kilmer, Anthony Hopkins

THE PITCH Farrell plays bisexual warlord Alexander the Great. As his mom, Jolie proves MILFs existed in ancient times, too!

THE VERDICT With Stone at the helm it should be suitably epic, as long as he doesn't start fingering Hopkins's Ptolemy as the shooter on the grassy knoll.

THE GRUDGE

DIRECTED BY Takashi Shimizu

STARRING Sarah Michelle Gellar, Clea DuVall

THE PITCH Nurse Sarah Michelle Gellar is exposed to a mysterious *Ring*-type curse in this latest remake of a Japanese horror franchise.

THE VERDICT The trailer promises take-some-spare-pants-along scares, as does the executive-producing presence of *Evil Dead/Spider-Man* auteur Sam Raimi.

KINSEY

DIRECTED BY Bill Condon

STARRING Liam Neeson, Peter Sarsgaard

THE PITCH Suitably explicit biopic of Alfred Kinsey, whose sex reports in the '40s and '50s revealed just how much action the average American was getting.

THE VERDICT Neeson is extremely impressive as the titular bisexual scientist, while Saarsgard is, well, often full-frontally nude as his assistant-lover.

Suzanne Tenner (*Surviving Christmas*); Merie W. Wallace (*Sideways*); Dennis Kleiman/Retna Ltd. (*Dig!*); Oliver Upton (*Shaun of the Dead*); Sara DeBoer/Retna Ltd. (*Uncle Kracker*); Courtesy of Pixar Animation Studios (*The Incredibles*); Deana Newcomb (*The Ringer*); Courtesy of Melinda Sue Gordon (*Team America*); Jaap Buitendijk (*Alexander*); Takashi Seida (*The Grudge*); Ken Regan/Camera 5 (*Kinsey*)

Michael Moore: "For the last time, I'm *not* that *Super Size Me* guy!"

CALL TO ARMS

The highest-grossing and most controversial documentary ever gets a DVD release, just in time for Election Day. By Clark Collis

FAHRENHEIT 9/11

DIRECTED BY Michael Moore

STARRING Michael Moore, George W. Bush, the U.S. Army

COLUMBIA TRISTAR HOME ENTERTAINMENT

★★★★

HERE'S A FUN GAME: Ask your friends what they thought about this summer's films and see how often the following phrases crop up: "It was OK." "I preferred the first movie." "They made a movie of *Garfield*? *Really*?!"

While the 2004 blockbuster season may not have been better or worse than any previous year's, it seemed particularly forgettable. The exception is Michael Moore's anti-George Bush tirade *Fahrenheit 9/11*, which, like his previous films *Roger & Me* and *Bowling For Columbine*, combines newsreel footage with the director-star's own prankish leanings, this time with infinitely greater commercial and cultural impact. Indeed, a full month after its release Republican congressman David Dreier was still denouncing the movie on Bill Maher's HBO show, claiming it wasn't a documentary at all, likening it to the Soviet propaganda newspaper *Pravda* (nice contemporary reference, dude!).

MOORE WRAPS HIS BITTER PILL IN SUGAR.

Dreier did have a point, though. In its depiction of Bush as a lazy, barely literate jack-off, *Fahrenheit 9/11* comes as close to the fair-and-balanced documentary ideal as, well, an episode of *The O'Reilly Factor*. But, unlike his conservative peers, Moore deftly wraps his bitter polemic pill in an effective sugar-coating of comedy. Learning that virtually no one in Congress actually looked at the Patriot Act before passing it, he reads it to the Capitol building through a megaphone. Meanwhile, the riff from the song "Cocaine" punctuates mention of Bush's murky military record.

Whether you love Michael Moore or hate him, the result, which arrives on DVD complete with deleted scenes, director's commentary and Condoleezza Rice's 9/11 Commission testimony, is a movie which simply *has* to be seen – if only so you can decide quite how much you hate him.

Michael Moore with Congressman John Tanner (D-TN) on Capitol Hill.

THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK

UNIVERSAL STUDIOS HOME VIDEO

★★★

Film directors are always bitching about not being given enough money, but increasingly, *Blender* believes they should be getting even less. Certainly David Twohy did much better with 2000's small-budgeted *Pitch Black* than on its pricey, overblown sequel in which Vin Diesel's far-future antihero battles against the forces of darkness and a complex, migraine-inducing Tolkien-in-space plot. But don't miss the second-act prison scene in which Diesel kills someone with . . . a teacup!

CLERKS: 10TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

MIRAMAX HOME ENTERTAINMENT

★★★★

"My girlfriend's sucked 37 dicks!" "In a row?" What does Kevin Smith's debut movie look like 10 years after its release? Desperately underfunded, technically poor and amateurly directed. Of course, that's what it looked like *when* it was released. But Smith's gratuitously grotesque, hilariously un-PC dialogue now sounds even funnier as his disgruntled McJobbers ruminate on the travails of being an independent contractor on the Death Star and how much "jizz-moppers" make per hour. This three-disc set includes commentaries, documentaries and an unrated version of the film.

Will Ferrell prepares to write his name in the snow.

DAZED & CONFUSED

★★★★★

FAST TIMES AT RIDGEMONT HIGH

★★★★★

UNIVERSAL STUDIOS HOME VIDEO

As Matthew McConaughey's stoner-icon Wooderson famously muses in *Dazed & Confused*, the great thing about high school girls is that, while he keeps getting older, they stay the same age. And the same applies to these two classics. Certainly there is a thrill in examining the freshly scrubbed faces and, on occasion, other body parts, of the future stars of both sexes. *Dazed* has McConaughey, Milla Jovovich and Ben Affleck (perfectly cast as a paddle-wielding bully) while *Fast Times* offers Sean Penn as Wooderson's spiritual predecessor Spicoli, the unutterably bodacious Phoebe Cates and Judge Reinhold (perfectly cast as a, um, masturbating dork). But the real stars are the authentic scripts penned, respectively by Richard Linklater and Cameron Crowe. Available both individually and as a double-pack, these special editions also include commentaries and, in the case of *Dazed*, deleted scenes.

DODGEBALL

20TH CENTURY FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT

★★★★

Do you like seeing people get hit in the nuts by a plastic sphere? Then you are going to really, really, really, really, *really*, *REALLY* love *Dodgeball*.

"Ever get the feeling we're being followed?"

Clockwise, from top left: The Everett Collection; Alan Markfield/New Line Productions; the Kobal Collection; the Everett Collection

"Don't like my driving? Call 1-800-EAT-SHIT!"

There are, though, some other attractions to be found, including Vince Vaughn's horizontally laidback gym owner, Rip Torn's maniacal wrench-throwing coach and *Blender*'s new favorite last line ever: "Fuck Chuck Norris!"

ELF

WARNER HOME VIDEO

✪✪✪✪

A sweeter, younger sibling to the demented *Bad Santa*, this X'mas-oriented Will Ferrell vehicle has the ex-*SNL*-er first adopted by Santa's elves before making his way back to an unsuspecting New York. Once there, he accuses a department-store Kris Kringle of being a fraud ("You sit on a throne of lies!"), confuses high-powered little person author Peter Dinklage with one of his former North Pole colleagues ("He's an *angry* elf!") and brings out the inner fuzziness of bewildered dad James Caan. Eggnog all round!

THE STEPFORD WIVES

PARAMOUNT HOME ENTERTAINMENT

✪

The most misbegotten movie of the year, this "comic" remake of the effective 1975 sci-fi chiller finds every member of the cast hitting a different acting tone – all of them the wrong ones. Nicole Kidman is particularly poor as a shrieking, twitching, shit-canned TV exec who suspects there is something wrong about her new home of Stepford *other* than the fact that Bette Midler lives there. Then again – and we're just spit-balling here – perhaps the idea of turning overachieving women into mechanically controlled rape victims just isn't all that funny.

TROY

WARNER HOME VIDEO

✪✪✪

Sing, O muse, the anger of Peleus's son, Achilles, who brought countless ills upon the Achaeans. Also sing, while you're at it, the anger of WB execs, who sank $150 million into this adaptation of Homer's *The Iliad* only to have audiences react as enthusiastically as school kids studying iambic pentameter. *Troy* isn't a complete disaster. The cast conducts itself admirably, especially Eric Bana, and the battles are suitably bloody, but it's a very long journey for little payoff. Luckily, the DVD provides background for those who skipped this in favor of *The Odyssey* in high school. *ERIC ALT*

VAN HELSING

UNIVERSAL STUDIOS HOME VIDEO

✪✪

A crowded, uncomfortable and seemingly endless bus trip of a film *Van Helsing* finds Hugh Jackman's titular monster-slayer taking on Dracula, Frankenstein, the Wolf Man and Mr. Hyde. Presumably director Stephen Sommers was saving the Toxic Avenger for the sequel – although given the film's lukewarm box-office reception, it seems we may be mercifully saved that experience. Includes a Sommers commentary, plus a "360 Degree Tour of Dracula's Castle."

BLENDER APPROVED

The best DVDs of the last three months

DA ALI G SHOW: DA COMPLEET FIRST SEAZON

HBO VIDEO

Cutting subversive wit in a moronic B-boy smokescreen.

MEAN GIRLS

PARAMOUNT HOME ENTERTAINMENT

Lindsay Lohan displays her ample assets in this *Heathers*-esque high school black comedy.

MUSIC DVDs BY CLARK COLLIS

THE WHO

LIVE AT THE ISLE OF WIGHT *EAGLE VISION*

✪✪✪✪

Filmed seemingly in "Grouch-o-vision," this concert movie is punctuated by Pete Townshend calling the crowd "buggers" and bitching about the other groups on the bill. A new interview finds him no cheerier: "I really didn't like working with that band at all." But he admits the Who were "at their peak" in 1970, an assessment backed up by the Isle of Wight footage, which finds them thundering through early hits and an outlandishly large chunk of *Tommy*.

HANK WILLIAMS

HONKY TONK BLUES *MERCURY NASHVILLE*

✪✪✪✪✪

Exhaustively researched, interview-packed documentary that tracks Williams's progression from teen whorehouse fret-picker to country icon. Best revelation? Williams always bought cheap guitars because he so frequently had to defend himself with them against jealous boyfriends.

VARIOUS ARTISTS

SOUL TO SOUL *RHINO HOME VIDEO*

✪✪✪

In 1971, Wilson Pickett, Santana and others played in Ghana to celebrate the anniversary of the country's independence. While featuring great performances, it pales in comparison to *When We Were Kings* due to its lack of heavyweights-beating-the-crap-out-of-each-other footage.

10,000 MANIACS

TIME CAPSULE: FILMED 1982–1993

RHINO HOME VIDEO

✪✪✪

Despite patronage from Michael Stipe, the band never reaped anticipated success. *Time* takes them from inception to Natalie Merchant's solo departure, and reconfirms, through live footage and videos, that they were an engaging pop-folk act. *NICK DUERDEN*

VARIOUS ARTISTS

FESTIVAL EXPRESS *THINKFILM*

✪✪✪✪

In 1970, the Grateful Dead, Janis Joplin and a gaggle of psychedelic friends played a series of festivals in Canada. The resulting performances, captured here, are outstanding, as is the wild offstage behavior. "Hallucinogens," Bob Weir rather unnecessarily recalls, "were involved."

DJ SHADOW

LIVE! IN TUNE AND ON TIME *GEFFEN*

✪✪✪

Most concerts aren't structured into five acts, but most DJs aren't as ambitious as Shadow. Shot in London, the trip-hop pioneer not only matches beats but stays in tune, building a seamless arc of music meshed with mesmerizing, carefully synced visuals. Call it turntable theater. *NICK CATUCCI*

WENN Photos/Newscom.com (*Da Ali G Show*); Alex Bailey (*Troy*); Michael Gibson (*Mean Girls*)

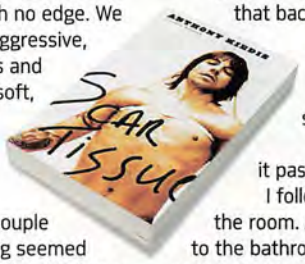
The Red Hot Chili Peppers: Relieved they didn't name themselves "The Flaming Bags of Crap."

THE BEST PART OF A BIG BOOK!

RUDE BOYS

Recording their first album, tubesock enthusiasts Red Hot Chili Peppers settle "creative differences" by shitting in a box!

TO PRODUCE THE album, Flea and I both recommended Andy Gill, the guitar player from Gang of Four . . . . [Gill] was much different than we expected. He was approachable, but he was also very English, semi-aloof, clearly intelligent but with no edge. We were these very aggressive, volatile individuals and then there's this soft, smarty-pants English guy. . . . So there was a little tension.



For the first couple of days, everything seemed fine. But I soon realized Gill was going for a sound that wasn't us. By the end of the sessions, Flea and I would literally stomp out of the studio into the control room, crawl over the console VU meters and scream, "Fuck you! We hate you! This is shit!" at Andy. Andy was completely calm the whole time — very English.

We did some lighthearted stuff, too. We were in the middle of a heated argument with Andy one night when Flea said, "Let's put this on hold. I'm going to take a big shiny shit.

"Oh yeah, be sure and bring that back for me then, won't you?" Andy said drolly.

"OK," Flea said.

"I wouldn't put it past you," Andy said.

I followed Flea out of the room. And all the way to the bathroom, we were saying, "Let's really bring him the shit."

So Flea defecated and we put it into an empty pizza box that was in the studio and we went running back down the hallway and delivered the shit pizza to Andy.

He just rolled his eyes and said, "How predictable."

To this day, Flea always points to that incident to demonstrate why we're such a good band.

FLEA DEFECATED INTO A PIZZA BOX.

Excerpted from Scar Tissue: My Life with the Red Hot Chili Peppers, *by Anthony Kiedis with Larry Sloman, © 2004 by Hyperion*

THE GUIDE BOOKS

KILLING BONO

By Neil McCormick

★★★★ *VH1/POCKET BOOKS, $14*

Journalist Neil McCormick met Bono at school in Dublin, where they shared a dream of rock stardom. For some unfathomable reason, however, fate blessed U2 and ignored Frankie Corpse and the Undertakers, leaving McCormick with the eternal suspicion that Bono had stolen his life. Contrasting the writer's struggle for fame with his friend's messiah-like ascent, *Killing Bono* multitasks as an affectionate coming-of-age memoir, an intimate rock biography and a Nick Hornbyish meditation on — finally — growing up. *VICTORIA SEGAL*

THE WILCO BOOK

By Wilco and PictureBox

★★★★ *PICTUREBOX, $30*

A tome designed to make you feel either very clever or very stupid, this book — make that "audio-visual rumination" — about the erstwhile country-rockers boasts gnomic diagrams, hymnal music sheets and essays from *Ice Storm* writer Rick Moody as well as, less explicably, long dead scribe Henry Miller. More illuminating are the lengthy interviews with band members, but what truly renders this an essential fan purchase is the accompanying CD of 12 previously unreleased tracks culled from Wilco's *A Ghost Is Born* sessions. *CLARK COLLIS*

DOS & DON'TS: 10 YEARS OF *VICE* MAGAZINE'S STREET FASHION CRITIQUES

By Gavin MacInnes, Surrosh Alvi and Shane Smith

★★★ *WARNER BOOKS, $18*

A catty hipster yearbook with T&A (in this case, "T" also stands for testicles) *Vice*'s second book features cleverly captioned shots of the best- and worst-dressed non-celebs from its "Dos & Don'ts" section. For *Vice*, stylishness is a state of being, thus "Dos" are heavy on shots of Asian women and homeless men, while "Don'ts" mock the fat, awkward, and overly fashion-conscious. Whichever you are, beware the dangling scrotum! *YANCEY STRICKLER*

YOU CALL IT MADNESS

By Lenny Kaye

★★★★ *VILARD, $26*

Patti Smith Group guitarist/rock journalist Lenny Kaye sets the way-back machine for the Depression, when the advent of the microphone enabled a new breed of male singer to croon warm, sweet everythings into female ears. With a lively, hipster-tabloid prose style, Kaye focuses on Bing Crosby, Rudy Vallee and the forgotten Russ Columbo, whose career rose and fell within three years, ending when his best friend shot him in the eye. Kaye makes Columbo's cautionary tale echo down the corridors of pop history. *RICHARD GEHR*

BLENDER APPROVED

The best BOOKS of the last three months

THE PHISH COMPANION

A GUIDE TO THE BAND AND THEIR MUSIC

BACKBEAT BOOKS, $25

Relive the jam band's glory days with this 10-years-in-the-making tome.

RIVERS' EDGE

THE WEEZER STORY

By John D. Luerssen *ECW PRESS, $20*

Obsessive, fascinating account of the prototypical emo band and the troubled genius behind it.

Top left: Patricia Steur/Sunshine/Retna UK. Book covers: Alphonse Telymonde

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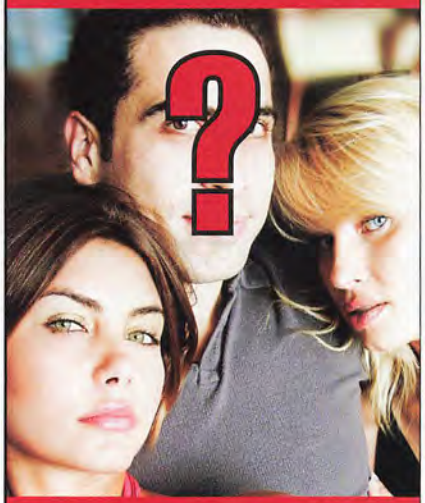
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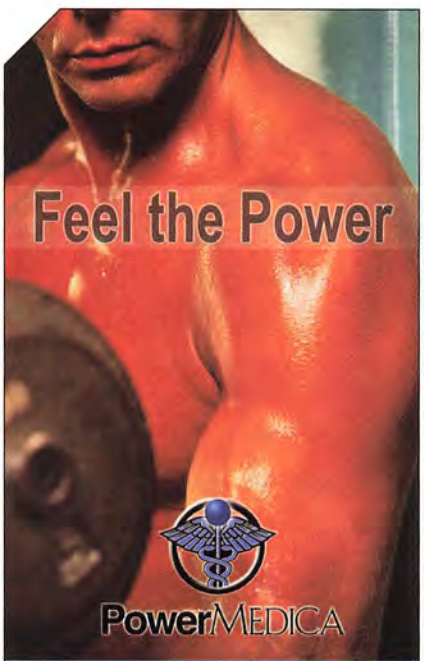

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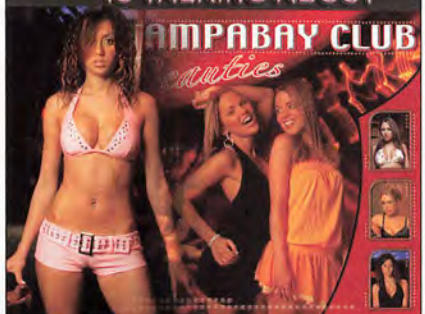

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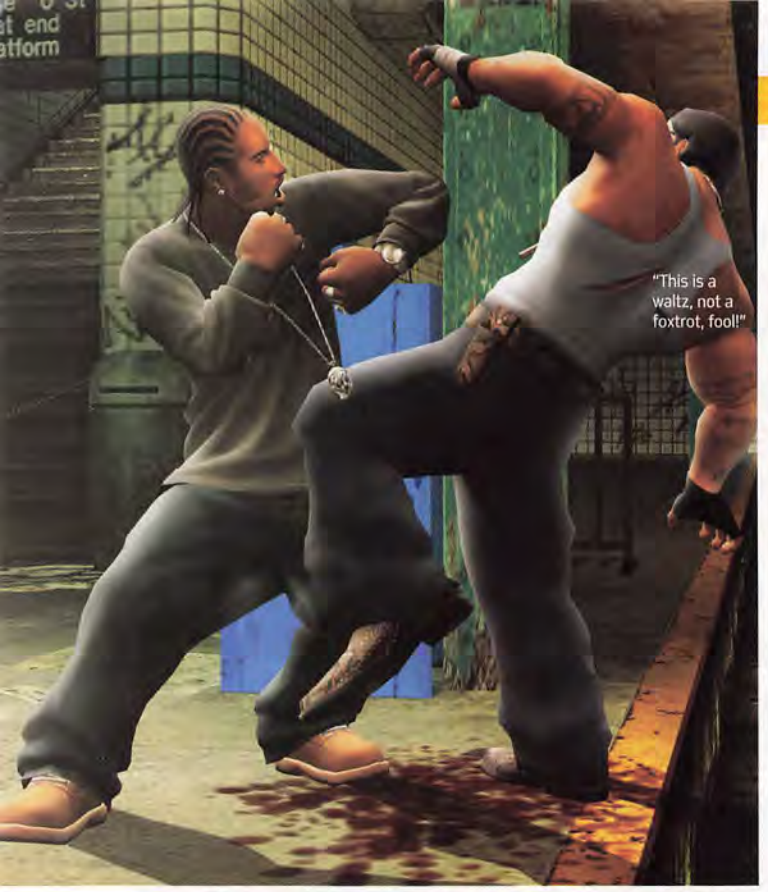

HARD KNOCKS

Give your favorite rappers a beat-down in this useful punched-up sequel. By Jonah Weiner and Gabe Soria

DEF JAM FIGHT FOR NY

EA – PS2, XBOX, GAMECUBE

✪✪✪✪

IN REAL LIFE, it's not a good idea to punch Ludacris in the face, slam construction boots into his groin, then smash his Escalade as he makes a break for it. If his homeys don't get you, his lawyers certainly can. Thankfully, homeys and lawyers have no pull in the follow-up to last year's *Def Jam Vendetta*, a comically violent action game in which the object is simple: Pummel as many rappers as you can.

IT'S NOT A GOOD IDEA TO PUNCH LUDACRIS.

With friends, you can pick from a cast of playable MCs (including Busta Rhymes, Method Man, Fat Joe and Snoop Dogg) and smack the sizzurp out of each other. On your own, you play as a street fighter on the rise in a fictitious New York underworld of multiplatinum brawlers. On the way, you earn the loyalty of ganglord D-Mob by springing him from the back of a police car and generally trouncing his enemies in bare-knuckled subterranean showdowns. Call it *In da Fight Club*.

With the press of a button, you can hurl taunts at opponents (though it's hard to beat Redman's "I'm gonna rip your tongue out and lick my ass with it"), use contraband weapons (bats, broken bottles), and land special "Blazin' Moves" (a discomfiting percentage of which involve crushed testicles). But this wouldn't be a hip-hop game without bling: A bonus feature lets you custom-design your fighter with brand-name gear, and you can even visit Jacob the Jeweler for ice (the more money you earn fighting, the more extravagant the stones you can afford). *Blender* had the most fun constructing a 6-foot-7-inch, 260-pound fighter with blond dreadlocks, aviator sunglasses, short-shorts and a voice like Macaulay Culkin's, proving you don't need to look cool to be a bad ass.

NEO CONTRA

KONAMI – PS2

Searching for complexity? Look elsewhere. Short-attention-span sci-fi bloodshed is the rule in this update of beloved '80s relic *Contra*. Space commandos shooting aliens and then, for variety, shooting them really fast is as deep as *Neo Contra* gets. The real treat is the game's grotesque eye candy seemingly inspired by hefty doses of PCP and heavy metal. Gigantic baby-headed troglodytes? We could swear they crawled right off a Dio album cover. ✪✪✪

SLY 2: BAND OF THIEVES

SONY – PS2

The adventures of a globe-trotting raccoon jewel thief sound like a concept from Saturday-morning-cartoon hell, but *Sly 2* delivers the surprises of a *Finding Nemo*-style animated film. Kids will love the talking animal stuff, but adults will dig the lushly rendered locations (a midnight excursion on the rooftops of Paris is a standout) and Sly's James Bond-esque flirtations with the two female agents on his trail. This raccoon's a horndog! ✪✪✪

FORGOTTEN REALMS: DEMON STONE

ATARI– PS2

Demon Stone lays the pretentious grandeur on thick: There's a lot of jabber (from *Star Trek*'s golden-throated Patrick Stewart) about creatures from another dimension despoiling the land – yadda, yadda, yadda. Fantasy geeks will love the scope ("Look! Dragons in the sky!") and the use of the original Dungeons & Dragons' convoluted rules, but they can't deny it sucks the fun out of the beast-slaying mayhem. ✪✪

BLOOD RAYNE 2

MAJESCO – PS2, XBOX

Those awaiting a *Kill Bill* videogame need look no further. As Rayne – a vampire heroine to whom skintight outfits are as crucial as ripe aortas – you slice enemies with a balance of grace and gore. Moves are richly choreographed, scenes have a shadowy sheen, and there's a dance-like quality to the limbs you send soaring. Or at least you can tell yourself that when you feel gross for spending eight hours turning foes into mottled quadriplegics. ✪✪✪✪✪

BLENDER APPROVED

The best GAMES of the last three month

DONKEY KONGA

NINTENDO – GAMECUBE

Beat electronic bongos while trying to keep time to pop hits in this ridiculous and addictive party game.

DOOM III

ACTIVISION – PC, XBOX

Mars, marines and monsters: Mix 'em up, and you have an ultra-violent gaming wet dream!

you play
you die
you reset.
NINTENDO GAMECUBE
Learn to fight like a girl.
Like a butt kicking bounty hunting girl.
Become the bounty hunter behind the visor once more and travel to a planet torn into light and darkness in the tension packed Metroid Prime 2 Echoes.
NINTENDO GAMECUBE
METROID PRIME 2 ECHOES
TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
it's life in the city.
circuit city
Just what I needed.℠
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WIN THIS iPOD

Not only do you win this 20GB iPod, you get the JBL OnStage, a lightweight compact speaker that transforms your iPod into a stereo wherever you go! Send us your puzzle and contact info by Nov. 9, 2004. We'll pick a winner at random and post the winner's name at blender.com/crossword. *Yee-haw!*

PENCIL ME IN!

Hey, it's *Blender*'s crossword! Starring 18 Across!

BY BRENDAN QUIGLEY

ACROSS

1 The Hives' strutting single of 2004 (three words)
6 Dita Von Teese's fiancé
8 1974 Steely Dan record, *Pretzel* ___
10 Janet Jackson's boy-toy Jermaine
12 Fuse TV fare
14 "___ You Crazy Diamond" by Pink Floyd (two words)
16 Group that lives on Fascination Street (two words)
18 Franz Ferdinand's gender-bending love song
20 This group thinks you're fit, but you know it
21 Mr. Coyne of the Flaming Lips
22 Donna Summer's genre
24 "Hotel California" balladeers
25 This Dave is under the table and dreaming
27 "Pieces of Me" chanteuse with an MTV reality show (two words)

DOWN

2 ___ Supply
3 They call him "Mellow Yellow"
4 *A Ghost Is Born* chroniclers
5 ZZ Top's favorite body parts?
6 Seattle-based Alt-rockers with the hit "Float On" (two words)
7 Billy Joel: "We __ Start the Fire"
9 Usher's best-selling 2004 disc
11 He knows what it sounds like when doves cry
13 Lauryn Hill's old hip-hop group
15 U2 song where Bono urges us to carry each other
19 Word repeated in Dylan's "___ Lady ___"
20 Singer who'll play Jean Harlow in *The Aviator*
21 Stealers ___ ("Stuck In the Middle" band)
23 Rolling Stones lyric: "Jumpin' Jack Flash, it's ___ ___" (two words)
26 My Chemical Romance's genre

→ Send your completed puzzle to *Blender* Puzzle Contest, 1040 Avenue of the Americas, 22nd floor, New York, New York 10018

POP HISTORY!

OCTOBER 2004: AVRIL LAVIGNE, WILLIAM HUNG AND MICHAEL JACKSON ENTER THE PRESIDENTIAL RACE

WRITTEN BY CLARK COLLIS. ILLUSTRATED BY JOHN JAY

↓ The 2004 election would always be remembered for its many celebrity candidates. First came Avril . . .

↓ Next came William Hung.

↓ And finally. . .

"I support free plastic surgery for all and (cough) amnesty for pedophiles."
VOTE JACKSON: KEEP the WHITE HOUSE WHITE
"Wait, what was that last one again?"

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He's the 41-year-old balding, gray-haired English DJ whose real name is Quentin and who is utterly useless in a fight. Which almost answers the question . . .

BY ROB TANNENBAUM
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LEGO

WHO DOES FATBOY SLIM THINK HE IS?

Hmm. The self-portrait you drew has more hair than you do.
I drew it last night when I was fairly drunk. I have a widow's peak – it's a sign of virility and sexual prowess.

Yes, that's what balding people always say.
That's the thing, though. I'm not balding. When I was about 21, I thought, "Oh God, I'm going bald." But *(knocks wood)* my hairline doesn't seem to have moved for like 15 years. There's a few other things that haven't moved in 15 years, as well.

You're a legendary drinker. So what's "fairly drunk" for you?
"Really drunk" is when you can't remember how you got home. "Too drunk" is when you start leaning on things that aren't there. I'm a happy, productive drunk. I've written my best songs drunk. I'm always drunk when I DJ. I tried to DJ sober, and it was rubbish. No, I'm very good at being drunk. I very rarely vomit.

What did they call you when you were a kid, Fatboy?
My parents named me Quentin, which was the name of England's most famous homosexual, Quentin Crisp. For years, everyone called me "Quentin Crisp," and I got kind of sick of it. When I joined a band, I thought, "This is a good time to shed the name," and I changed it to Norman.

"Norman" is a strange name to pick. Like "Norman Bates"?
A psychopath is better than an outrageous homosexual, especially in the schoolyard, y'know? You have to have been called Quentin to realize that any other name is great.

What medication are you on?
I've just been on painkillers for about a month, because I fucked my face up. I was in Portugal, and got up to get a glass of water, slipped on a rug, and went face down on the bedpost. Broke my nose, rearranged my face, fucked up my lip. My wife switched the light on, and I was lying face down in a pool of blood. She said it looked like a Mafia hit.

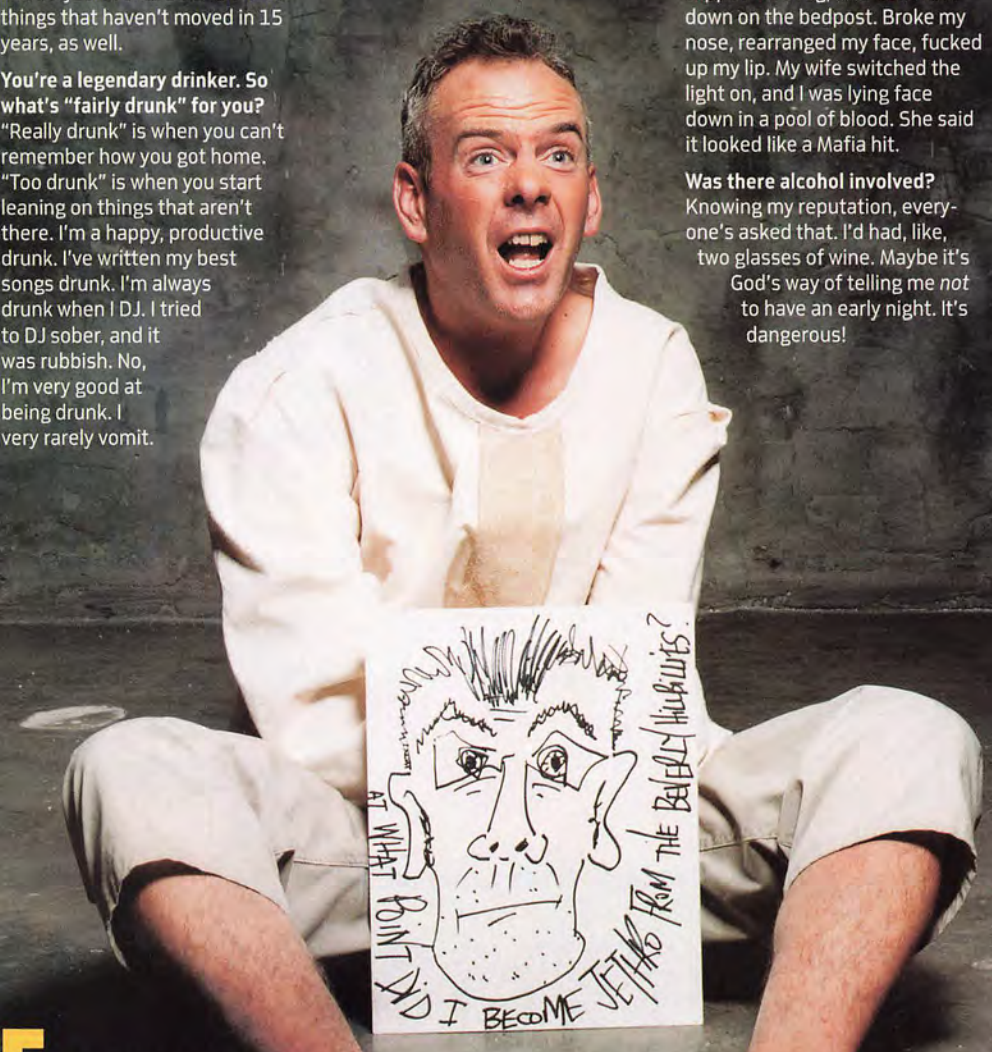
Was there alcohol involved?
Knowing my reputation, everyone's asked that. I'd had, like, two glasses of wine. Maybe it's God's way of telling me *not* to have an early night. It's dangerous!

Here's a riddle: Does the ecstasy make the music sound good, or does the music make the ecstasy feel good?
I could have a really great night listening to music without ecstasy, and I could have a really great night on ecstasy without hearing any music. In England, you just assume the whole crowd will be on something. But it's all coke in England. It's a shame, but the Es just got really shit, and you have to do four to get any hit.

What's your favorite swear word?
Can I have two? *(In an Italian accent)* "You fuckin' fuck." It's kind of *Sopranos*-related. I only curse in jest, because I'm a pacifist, and I don't like getting punched. I've been beaten up by skinheads, by ex-girlfriends, but I've never hit anyone in my life.

So how do you avoid getting walloped?
I just run away, or apologize, or curl up in a ball going, "Please don't hit me anymore."

If you could change one thing about your body, what would it be?
I don't mind going bald, and I don't mind going gray. But bald *and* gray? That's not right. Proper pop stars don't go gray. Also, a couple of extra inches on my penis would be fine, while you're at it. [BLENDER]



"I VERY RARELY VOMIT."

Styling by Nicole Guiotta; grooming by Andie Markoe-Byrne

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